

**LEXICAL COMPETENCE OF MALAYSIAN
ENGLISH LEXEMES AND SOCIAL
CONNECTEDNESS OF MALAYSIAN
THIRD CULTURE KIDS**

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THIRD CULTURE KIDS**

by

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CVI	Content Validity Index
I-CVI	Item-Content Validity Index
JEPeM-USM	<i>Jawatankuasa Etika Penyelidikan Manusia-USM</i>
LexTALE	Lexical Test for Advanced Learners of English
LFP	Lexical Frequency Profile
MCQ	Multiple Choice Questions
ME	Malaysian English
MTCK	Malaysian Third Culture Kid
NVivo 14	Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
NVLT	New Vocabulary Level Test
RO/RQ	Research Objectives/Research Questions
S-CVI	Scale Content Validity Index
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Science
TA	Thematic Analysis
TCK	Third Culture Kid
VCTPA	Vocabulary-size Test of Controlled Productive Ability
VKS	Vocabulary Knowledge Scale
VLT	Vocabulary Level Test
VST	Vocabulary Size Test
WAT	Word Associate Test

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**KECEKAPAN LEKSIKAL LEKSEM MALAYSIAN ENGLISH DAN
KESALINGHUBUNGAN SOSIAL DALAM KALANGAN THIRD CULTURE
KIDS MALAYSIA**

ABSTRAK

Third Culture Kids (TCKs) adalah individu yang dibesarkan dalam budaya yang berbeza daripada negara asal kewarganegaraan mereka dan hidup dalam persekitaran yang berbeza semasa sebahagian besar daripada tempoh perkembangan kanak-kanak mereka. Disebabkan oleh latar belakang peralihan ini, mereka sering menghadapi cabaran dalam mencapai komunikasi dan hubungan sosial yang berkesan, terutamanya ketika cuba menyesuaikan diri semula di negara asal mereka. Walaupun banyak kajian terdahulu menumpukan perhatain kepada TCKs dari Amerika, kurang tumpuan telah diberikan kepada TCKs dari Asia, yang mencetuskan kekurangan dalam literatur kajian. Kajian ini menanangi kekurangan tersebut dengan meneroka kompetensi leksikal *Malaysian Third Culture Kids (MTCKs)* dan kebolehan mereka untuk berhubung secara sosial dengan komuniti penutur Malaysia melalui leksikal Bahasa Inggeris Malaysia atau *Malaysian English (ME)*. Seramai 101 MTCKs telah dikaji untuk menilai kedalaman perbendaharaan dan penggunaan kata bagi 30 leksikal yang telah dinativisasikan dalam ME, yang dipilih daripada kategori Informalisasi. Kaedah *Association-Interpretation* turut digunakan untuk menganalisis konseptualisasi budaya peserta, yang mengesahkan tahap kompetensi leksikal mereka yang tinggi dan memberikan pandangan mendalam tentang usaha mereka untuk mencapai kesalinghubungan sosial. Untuk mengesahkan lagi penemuan ini, 10 MTCKs mengambil bahagian dalam temu bual separa berstruktur, dengan data dianalisis melalui pendekatan tematik induktif. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan

bahawa varieti baharu seperti ME memaikan peranan penting bukan sahaja dalam komunikasi yang berkesan, tetapi juga dalam membantu individu yang mengalami keterasingan budaya seperti MTCKs untuk membina dan berkongsi identiti budaya. Ini menekankan kepentingan ME sebagai mekanisme utama dalam kesalinghubungan sosial. Kajian ini memberikan implikasi teori, metodologi dan sosial yang penting, terutamanya dalam bidang sosiolinguistik dan linguistik budaya, dengan menekankan bahawa bahasa adalah cara berkesan yang menjadi jambatan kepada jurang budaya, justeru menyokong pembentukan identiti dalam konteks kepelbagaian budaya.

LEXICAL COMPETENCE OF MALAYSIAN ENGLISH LEXEMES AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS OF MALAYSIAN THIRD CULTURE KIDS

ABSTRACT

Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are individuals raised in cultures other than their country of nationality and live in different environments during a significant part of their child development years. Due to their transitional upbringing, this creates challenges for them in achieving effective communication and social connection, particularly when reintegrating into their home countries. While much of the existing research focuses on American TCKs, less attention has been given to Asian TCKs, creating a gap in the literature. This study addresses this gap by exploring the lexical competence of Malaysian Third Culture Kids (MTCKs) and their ability to socially connect with the Malaysian speech community through Malaysian English (ME) lexemes. A total of 101 MTCKs were studied to assess their vocabulary depth and use of 30 nativised English lexemes in ME, selected from the category of Informalization. The Association-Interpretation method was also employed to analyse participants' cultural conceptualisations, confirming their high levels of lexical competence and providing deeper insights into their efforts to achieve social connectedness. To further validate these findings, 10 MTCKs participated in semi-structured interviews, with data analysed through an inductive thematic approach. The results revealed that New English varieties such as ME play a vital role not only in effective communication, but also in helping individuals who experience cultural homelessness such as MTCKs to construct and share a sense of cultural identity, reflecting the significance of ME as a key mechanism for social connectedness. The study offers important theoretical, methodological and societal implications especially for the fields of sociolinguistics

and cultural linguistics, highlighting the essential means of language in bridging cultural gaps and supporting identity formation in multicultural contexts.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the thesis. It delivers a brief introduction to the study conducted which includes the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research questions, significance of the research, scope and delimitations of the study as well as the definition of key terms.

1.2 Background of the Study

In the study of Third Culture Kids (TCKs), social connectedness is frequently cited as one of the primary goals and challenges upon adaptation to new environments, especially in achieving effective communication with TCKs' own home communities. According to Pollock and Van Reken (2009: p.13), TCKs are "individuals who are or were as children, raised in a culture other than their parents' or the culture of their nationality, and live in different environments for a significantly large part of their child development years." 'Significantly large part' in this context implies "one year or more and for TCKs, the period must occur within the range of their birth to 18 years of age" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009: p.21). Although the word "*kids*" is used for this term, these individuals refer to children, teenagers and adults as well. The term "*third*" was derived from earlier studies of "*first culture*" which refers to the cultures that the parents originated and "*second culture*" which refers to the culture a family currently resides. "Third" therefore refers to the shared commonality among individuals that are living in an international mobile way of life (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Melles & Schwartz, 2013).

In the literature on TCKs, research reveals that the process of growing up within multiple environments often affects their developmental growth in many aspects. Findings show that moving between different cultures even before one could fully develop their own personal and cultural identity, often causes many TCKs to experience personal identity crisis, cultural value confusions, political confusions, difficulties of understanding local colloquial language, questions of belonging, culture shock, marginality, and dealings of grief upon change, especially among the youth (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Lyttle, Barker & Cornwell, 2011; Selmer & Luring, 2014; Miller, Wiggins, & Feather, 2020; Ooi, Reed, Marchal-Jones, Meyer, & Gaab, 2022; Jones, Reed, Gaab, & Ooi, 2022; Doherty, Lieu, Aledeh, Edwards, & Kotera, 2023; Mosanya, 2023).

Literature on TCKs therefore, focuses prominently on aspects of emotional and psychological development among people who transit internationally like families of military forces, diplomats, missionaries, expatriates, immigrants, children of mixed cultural marriages, repatriating families and refugees (Cottrell & Useem, 1994; Pollock and Van Reken, 2009; Adams, 2014). Research in this area also include ample studies emphasizing on cultural adaptation and transitional effects towards TCKs' values, identities, characteristics, education, career, religion, knowledge of their own home nation's culture and language practices, mental state, emotional state, self-esteem, as well as their relationships and social connectedness (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Hoersting, 2010; Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Moore & Barker, 2012; Adams, 2014; Lily, 2014; Hisano, 2015; Long, 2016; Jungmin, 2019; Mizutani & Waalkes, 2023; Ra, Ko, Cha, & Kim, 2024).

Although problems of adaptation in new environments are commonly identified among TCKs all over the world, past studies have stressed the intensity of TCK's adjustment especially in adapting and achieving social connectedness with their own native countries upon returning home (Hoersting, 2010; Moore & Barker, 2012; Adams, 2014; Melles & Schwartz, 2013; Long; 2016). This is due to the lack of exposure and knowledge of their own home nations' cultures and language practices (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). In addition, when TCKs gain more proficiency in the English language due to their enrolment in English-based schools, they often lose fluency and depth of knowledge in their own native language and varieties (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Thus, local people would often view them as foreigners, especially when English is a second or third language in that country (Aitken, 2008). According to Long (2016) these are the reasons that have caused many Asian TCKs to experience difficulties in adaptation and establishment with their own local communities.

Aitken (2008) explains that because of this complicated situation, many TCKs feel they adapt better when moving to other foreign countries as compared to returning to their own home countries. According to a study by Washington and Gadikar (2013), some TCKs are not able to accept and readjust to their own home countries even as they grow older because of the cultural expectations and difficulties in achieving social connectedness. This situation of rootlessness has often led TCKs to isolate even further from their local communities and some even decide to move away and settle in other countries where they feel more accepted (Moore & Barker, 2012). Based on these logical grounds, the study stipulates that issues of social connectedness also occur among MTCKs and can be a factor that increases the number of Malaysian emigrations, which is perceived as an enormous loss to the government of Malaysia.

According to Pollock and Van Reken (2009), this loss is mainly because TCKs are frequently recognized as fundamental ‘assets’ in the workforce. Bonebright (2010) confirms this by stating that TCKs bring a positive impact to a society’s workforce because of their global experiences and advanced education. In his study, adult TCKs who were currently employed, worked as professional and administrative officers in the fields of health, nursing, education, business, finance, media, social services, military, or other fields that included international affairs (Bonebright, 2010). Earlier studies from Cottrell and Useem (1994) showed that TCKs are also likely to earn a bachelor’s degree, with about half of them earning at or after the age of 22. Education, medicine, business management, self-employment, and highly skilled positions were found as the most common professions among TCKs (Cottrell & Useem, 1994).

Statistics from the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2019) shows that the population of the Malaysian diaspora currently stands at about 1,732, 152 emigrations to countries such as Singapore, Australia, Brunei, the United Kingdom, India, the United States, and Canada. Factors of Malaysian emigration include economic reasons, education, business opportunities, family and marriage reasons, religious reasons, political issues, access to health insurance, ethnic discrimination and issues of social prejudice and disconnections (Ho & Tyson, 2011; Hugo, 2011). Since ME is regarded as a crucial element of unity (Thirusanku & Melor, 2012), it is imperative to explore more about the variety and study how it may function in helping Malaysian Third Culture Kids (MTCKs) to socially connect with the Malaysian speech community. Thus, examining MTCKs’ lexical competence in ME as well as their cultural conceptualisations in the variety, is suggested to provide understandings of their inclination and ability to achieve social connectedness within the Malaysian culture and community through language.

1.3 Problem Statement

Ample studies have suggested the complex relation between culture, social, and psychological factors that shape the experiences of TCKs. To attain more knowledge about these groups of people, the current study calls for more targeted research that focuses specifically on Malaysian Third Culture Kids' (MTCKs) linguistic abilities and cultural conceptualisations as a way to gain insights on their efforts to achieve a sense of social connectedness with the Malaysian speech community. To date, research on Asian TCKs have highlighted unique challenges and perspectives that differentiate them from American or Caucasian American TCKs. Specific research on MTCKs however, have not received much attention as most research has mainly focused on Japanese TCKs, Korean TCKs, Singaporean TCKs, and Chinese TCKs (Fry, 2009; Hisano, 2015; Long, 2016; Starr, Theng, Wong, Tong, Ibrahim, Chua, Yong, Loke, Dominic, Fernandez, & Peh, 2017; Jungmin, 2019; Mizutani & Waalkes, 2023). Although these studies generally highlight the intense challenges that Asian TCKs experience in terms of societal acceptance, findings show that the complexities involved often include language proficiency issues that relate to identity formation struggles and cultural adjustments, especially when they return back to their own home countries.

One clear example can be found in Long's (2016) research which focuses on Chinese TCKs returnees and their experiences in adapting within their native community. Findings from the interview session revealed that problems of linguistic competence were one of the main reasons that often caused them to feel emotionally distressed and socially disconnected. For instance, one of them expressed feelings of frustration whenever he was reminded of his true local heritage and language in order to be "more Chinese" (Long, 2016: p.68). Another participant admitted that there were

certain terminologies or local slangs that she was not familiar with and that it was something she “truly felt disappointed about” as her lack of lexical competence of the local Chinese variety caused her to feel more distant from her community (Long, 2016: p.69). These findings clearly show that language function more than just a medium of communication, but a mechanism for social connectedness as well. Thus, for TCKs who often experience cultural homelessness, the need for social belonging and attachment is even stronger due to the challenges of forming a stable identity.

According to Bell-Villada, Sichel, Eidse and Orr (2011), social belonging, recognition, and connection with people are three vital needs for the developmental processes of a human being. Maslow’s theory of human needs includes love and belongingness as the third most vital state (1943). Attachment theory, as explained by Bowlby (1979) emphasizes the necessity for social connectedness, especially at early ages because of the imperativeness in understanding human development. Guerra and Bradshaw (2008), explains the significance of social connectedness in relation to the well-being and health of an individual as their study showed how youth dissatisfaction with social support and connection associated with depression, anxiety, stress, and poor sleep. Other studies have found inflammation, accelerated aging, cardiovascular health risk, suicide, and mortality as some of the effects of poor social connection (Hawkley, & Cacioppo, 2010; Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Layton, 2010; Dashwood, & Son, 2011; Eisenberger, Moieni, Inagaki, Muscatell, & Irwin, 2016).

Social connectedness is also closely related to adaptive behavioural patterns, resilience, self-esteem, social competence and other positive psychological behaviours (Youngblade, Theokas, Schulenberg, Curry, Huang, & Novak, 2007). According to Foster, Horwitz, Thomas, Opperman, Gipson, Burnside, Stone and King (2017), the

term is defined as the degree to which an individual or a group of people are socially close, interrelated, or share common resources. It is understood as a core human need and is essential to nearly every aspect of health, well-being and development, whether it is within the interpersonal level, or a larger community level (Berkman, Kawachi, & Glymour, 2014). This is why in relation to the growth of an individual, social connectedness is often proposed as a primary determinant for youth adjustment (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008). However, TCKs who are forced to experience cultural adjustments during their youth usually lose connections and attachments with people of certain communities, especially with their own home communities (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Since numerous studies have shown the profound impact and benefits of social connectedness for both interpersonal and societal level, this issue is regarded as a critical concern for TCKs worldwide.

Holmes and O'Neill (2012) suggest that difficulties in adapting to TCKs' own home communities is mostly due to their insufficient cultural knowledge and incompetence of local languages and varieties. According to Moore and Barker (2012), TCKs who come from Asian countries face far more complex experiences and greater challenges, including aspects of language use when coming back to their home countries. This is because Asians put great value upon conformity towards cultural norms and local language trends, causing Asian TCKs to constantly feel left out, excluded, and disconnected from social groups of the local community (Moore & Barker, 2012). Apart from the need to learn local languages, Asian TCKs must also learn underlying meanings of certain phrases or words that are often used within the colloquial varieties (Long, 2016). On this basis, it is assumed that Malaysian TCKs (MTCKs) face similar situations, since the country is known for its diverse cultural

beliefs, language practices, and traditions rooted into their social matrix for generations (Azura & Normi, 2014).

However, to obtain clearer understandings of the phenomenon, more studies focusing on MTCKs' linguistic competence of their native language and varieties, must be conducted. As current literature clearly shows that there is a major research gap in the study of MTCKs, it is vital that more exploration on these groups of people is implemented for the benefit of the Malaysian society and especially for MTCKs, in order to fully ensure that they are able to achieve effective communication, and to ultimately gain a sense of social connectedness with the Malaysian speech community. Thus, to accomplish the research objectives of this study, one way is to examine MTCKs' linguistic ability on local languages and varieties, through the most important and basic element of a language, which is knowledge of words and how to use them, or more accurately, referred to as lexical competence.

In linguistics, lexical competence is described as “a cluster of knowledge within the form and meaning and the ability to use these lexical items in different context of communication” (Mendinueta & Caro, 2017: p.207). The current study suggests that instead of examining MTCKs' lexical competence of *Bahasa Malaysia*, which is the official language in Malaysia, it is more relevant to examine their levels of lexical competence of the Malaysian English (ME) variety. This is because, according to Mavić and Abram (2013), ME is the most frequently used colloquial language practiced among the Malaysian speech community. ME is also a unique variety that symbolizes the identity of Malaysians and a crucial element for unity among the country's multi-racial citizens (Thirusanku & Melor, 2012). Therefore, studying MTCKs' levels of lexical competence in ME, would direct to an

understanding of their unity, membership and social connectedness with the Malaysian speech community.

The study focuses on lexical competence instead of other linguistic competencies because, according to Jackson and Zé Amvela (2000) although nativisation is realized at all linguistic levels, it usually through lexis that New Englishes best assert themselves. Thus, to better understand the practical use of non-native English varieties such as ME, it is best to study it at the lexical level. Moreover, according to Kachru (2006), it is through the powerful influence of localized lexical forms in New Englishes that best reflect a speech community's way of articulation. Therefore, by studying MTCKs' levels of lexical competence in the ME variety, findings reflect their capability in understanding and communicating with other Malaysian speakers at its most basic level. According to many studies of New Englishes, nativisation at the lexical level involves several creative processes, such as borrowings, semantic shift, affixation, compounding, clipping, abbreviation, blending and hybrid compounding (Yen, 1990; Menon, 2003; Baskaran, 2005; Traugott, 2006; Vanhove, 2008; Pillai, 2008; Azli, 2010; Hajar, 2011; Hajar, 2014; Azirah & Tan, 2012; Grandy, 2012; Lee & Hall, 2019).

These processes, which are also found in ME, are realized in two ways, which are the borrowing of words from local languages or through a more innovative process of creating new words and meanings from existing English words (Kachru, 2006). A review of the literature on ME shows that there is a substantial gap in the available research of English words in ME that have gone through semantic shift as past studies on ME lexicalisation shows that more focus is placed on the growth and development of ME as a whole as well as the features of ME in terms of phonology and grammar

(Yen, 1990; Menon, 2003; Baskaran, 2005; Azli, 2010; Hajar, 2011; Hajar, 2014; Azirah & Tan, 2012; Thirusanku & Melor, 2012). These words, which are known as nativised English lexemes in ME, are English words that have lost their original meanings and have acquired new non-native meanings over some time (Menon, 2003). Since TCKs are known for their high levels of English language proficiency, it is more valuable to examine MTCKs' lexical competence of nativised English lexemes in ME. This approach can help assess their ability and awareness regarding the semantic differences between native English lexemes and non-native English lexemes in ME.

Lexis is the main focus of examination because “vocabulary of a language is what most clearly reflects the physical, social and cultural traits of its speakers” (Sapir, 1912: 228). According to Sharifian (2015), when it comes to the study of lexis in New English varieties such as ME, it is extremely important to look into speakers' cultural conceptualisations as well. This is because the ability to use non-native English varieties, means that one would need to have knowledge on how and when to apply languages in certain socio-cultural contexts (Hymes, 1971; Sharifian, 2015). To be able to do so, one would need to have the knowledge, thoughts and concepts of a particular culture in which the language is related to. Collectively, this is what Sharifian (2011) refer to as cultural conceptualisations.

In the theory of cultural linguistics, which looks into the relation between cultural conceptualisation and language, individual knowledge is represented in a distributed fashion. This implies that different cultural groups are not only formed by the physical proximity of individuals, but by relative participation of individuals in each other's conceptual world (Sharifian, 2011). Thus, exploring how nativised English lexemes in ME are embedded in MTCKs' cultural conceptualisations

broadens and provides a more holistic frame for understanding their levels of participation, membership and social connectedness within the Malaysian community through language. Since cultural linguistic studies have only covered several New English varieties such as African English, Aboriginal English, Persian English, and Chinese English (Sharifian, 2015; Xu & Sharifian, 2017; Kianbakht, 2020; Oliveira, 2020; Wen & Chen, 2021), exploring ME in the perspective of cultural linguistics therefore, contribute to the body of knowledge in this grounded theory. Moreover, as current studies focusing on cultural conceptualisations show that relatively little research has been done to look into the theoretical relation between lexical competence and cultural conceptualisations, findings of this study are expected to provide meaningful contribution to new knowledge in the field.

1.4 Research Objectives

As there is a lack of research on Asian TCKs' linguistic ability, the current study fills this gap of knowledge by examining MTCKs' levels of lexical competence of nativised English lexemes in ME through a quantitative research approach. Apart from that, this research also investigates how MTCKs' cultural conceptualisations are embedded in nativised English lexemes in ME and explores their past experiences with regard to ME as a mechanism for social connectedness through qualitative research approaches. All three research objectives and research questions are developed for the purpose of attaining insights on their lexical competence, cultural conceptualisations, and experiences relating to the ME variety as a way to obtain holistic understandings on their sense of social connectedness with the Malaysian speech community through language. Overall, the primary research objectives of the study are stated below:

- i) To examine Malaysian Third Culture Kids' levels of lexical competence of nativised English lexemes in Malaysian English.
- ii) To explore how nativised English lexemes in Malaysian English are embedded in Malaysian Third Culture Kids' cultural conceptualisations.
- iii) To explore how Malaysian Third Culture Kids experience Malaysian English as a mechanism to achieve social connectedness with the Malaysian speech community.

1.5 Research Questions

Given the research objectives above, the following are the research questions of the study:

- i) What are Malaysian Third Culture Kids' levels of lexical competence of nativised English lexemes in Malaysian English?
- ii) How are nativised English lexemes in Malaysian English embedded in Malaysian Third Culture Kids' cultural conceptualisations?
- iii) How do Malaysian Third Culture Kids experience Malaysian English as a mechanism to achieve social connectedness with the Malaysian speech community?

1.6 Significance of Research

Results of this study is stipulated to have significant implications for the benefit of international corporations in Malaysia, the Malaysian society and especially among Malaysian Third Culture Kids (MTCKs). This is because by studying and exposing more about the very existence of these groups of people in Malaysia, the Malaysian

society will eventually realize problems of social anxiety and social connectedness that are commonly faced by TCKs throughout the world. Professionals such as psychiatrists, teachers, educators and counsellors can lessen these problems faced by TCKs with the hope that it may help to improve their quality of life while going through the process of adaptation upon returning home. This way, TCKs will feel more comfortable settling down in their home countries and can therefore, provide valuable experiences and expertise in boosting a country's economic productivity. As mentioned before, TCKs are highly skilled, wise, and intelligent people because of their global experiences and advanced education (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Bonebright, 2010).

In addition, this study will have significant contributions to the existing knowledge and theories related to cultural linguistics and sociolinguistic studies, especially on Third Culture Kids (TCKs), New English varieties, Malaysian English (ME) lexis, and lexical competence. Since New English varieties remain a debatable and controversial topic due to its 'deviations' as some scholars criticize (Nair, 2017), the theoretical assumptions developed from the results of the study is expected to provide new knowledge on the significance of ME in Malaysia. Studying MTCKs' cultural conceptualisations in ME will also shed light in understanding their present culturally-related knowledge and cognition of the ME variety as well as their inclination and capability in blending with the Malaysian community so that problems of emigration or social disconnection can be avoided. The current study is also expected to motivate future research on the levels of lexical competence of nativised English lexemes in ME among other groups of people within the Malaysian community, such as between younger generations and older generations and in terms of gender differences, race, or educational levels.

Such studies will help to create a better understanding on the development of nativised English lexemes in ME and ME lexis as a whole. Lastly, in terms of TCKs, this will open for more opportunities for future research to look into other aspects of MTCKs in order to have a better understanding on the types of challenges and experiences they often face. This is because as mentioned before, TCKs who come from Asian countries face far more complex experiences and greater challenges due to the value of conformity towards cultural norms and local language trends, causing Asian TCKs to constantly feel abandoned, excluded, and disconnected from social groups (Moore & Barker, 2012).

1.7 Scope and Delimitations of the Research

Limitations in this research exist in aspects of participants' ethnicity, length of time living abroad, psychological or emotional states, characteristics, family backgrounds, sociolinguistic class, levels of language proficiencies and language preferences. Although these factors could become independent variables that may affect MTCK's levels of lexical competence of nativised English lexemes in ME, or their cultural conceptualisations and overall views of ME, the scope and delimitation of this study only focuses on their general knowledge of the variety as well as their general cultural conceptualisations in ME as this is the study's main objective.

Furthermore, the study only focuses on MTCKs who are currently in their youth, which is between the age of 18 to 35 years old as extent literatures have shown the significance of social connectedness within this critical age, especially among TCKs. In addition, literature shows that they are regarded as the dominant group of ME users in Malaysia. Thus, with the completion of this research, more studies can be conducted in exploring MTCKs' linguistic abilities and cultural conceptualisations

that may correlate to other social and communicative factors and within a wider range of age groups in Malaysia.

1.8 Definition of Key Terms

The following are the definitions on terms and variables to be used in this study:

1.8.1 Third Culture Kids (TCKs)

According to Pollock and Van Reken (2009), Third Culture Kids (TCKs) are people who were raised in a culture other than their parents' or the culture of their country of nationality, and live in different environments during a significant part of their child development years (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009: 21).

1.8.2 Malaysian Third Culture Kids (MTCKs)

Similar to the general definition of Third Culture Kids (TCKs), Malaysian TCKs are people who were raised in a culture other than their parents' or the culture of their country and nationality which is Malaysia, and live in different environments during a significant part of their child development years (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 13). For this study, Malaysian TCKs are simply defined as people that include teenagers or adults who have spent a significant amount of their child development years away from Malaysia.

1.8.3 Lexis

In linguistics, the term lexis is defined as a complete set of words in a language or a particular subset of words, assembled by some specific linguistic criteria” (Ruano-

García, 2010). Lexical items should therefore contain information on both the forms and definitions of a word, which means that knowing the definition of a lexical item is to know the semantic entailments the word brings with it (Grandy, 2012). As the term ‘lexis’, ‘vocabulary’ and ‘word’ all refer to similar concepts and meanings according to Jackson and Amvela (2000), these terms are thus used interchangeably in this research.

1.8.4 Semantic Shift

Semantic shift is defined as a form of language change regarding to the evolution of word usage or lexemes where the new and modern meanings would usually come to the point of creating radically different meanings from the original usage (Vanhove, 2008). In this research, semantic shift refers to the evolution of nativised English lexemes in Malaysian English (ME).

1.8.5 Malaysian English (ME)

According to Platt, Weber, and Ho (1984) Malaysian English is defined as a continuum ranging from the basilect to the highest acrolect variety. Nair (2017) describes the term as a new English variety where, although still close to the parent language, has many new characteristics that make it distinct from other New Englishes. This research focuses primarily on the ME mesolectal variety.

1.8.6 Nativised English Lexemes in Malaysian English (ME)

In ME, nativised English lexemes are English words that have lost their original colonial British meanings and have acquired new non-native meanings over some time (Menon, 2003). Although the process of lexical nativisation is realized in

two ways, this research only focuses on the evolution of English words that have new localized meanings in the Malaysian context.

1.8.7 Lexical Competence

Lexical competence is described as “a cluster of knowledge within the form, meaning and use of lexical items and the abilities and skills a person develops and deploys in different context of communication”. It is often measured according to three categories of vocabulary knowledge which are size, depth and use (Mendinueta & Caro, 2017). In this research however, lexical competence is measured according to two categories only which are vocabulary depth and use. This is based on thorough analysis and critical review of the literatures.

1.8.8 Cultural Conceptualisation

Cultural conceptualisation is defined as a cognitive process that involves the development and use of shared cultural knowledge by members of a speech community and encompasses a wide range of elements including schemas, categories, metaphors, and cultural models that are formed through cultural experiences, reflected in the language of the community (Sharifian, 2011).

1.8.9 Social Connectedness

Social connectedness is defined as the degree to which an individual or a group of people are socially close, interrelated, or share common resources (Foster, Horwitz, Thomas, Opperman, Gipson, Burnisde, Stone, & King, 2017).

1.8.10 Youth

In general, youth is defined as the period between childhood and adult age. In Malaysia, youth is defined as persons aged between 18 to 35 years old and are considered as key contributors to the nation's development (Zeinab, Asnarulkhadi, Bahaman, & Hayrol, 2019).

1.8.11 Cultural Homelessness

Cultural homelessness is the term which describes feelings of exclusion and not being belonged to a racial, ethnic, or specific cultural group. It has been conceptualised as a situationally imposed development challenge which often forces a child to accommodate to contradictory and changing norms, values, verbal and non-verbal communication styles, as well as attachment processes (Vivero & Jenkins, 1999).

1.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, an overview of the proposed study is presented. This includes discussions about the background information, problem statement, objectives and research questions, significance of the study, scope of the study, and definition of key terms. Further discussions that relate to the literatures of this study is provided in the next chapter in Literature Review (Chapter 2).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the relevant literature on Third Culture Kids (TCKs), New Englishes, Malaysian English (ME) lexis, theoretical frameworks of the study, measurements for the Lexical Competence Test of Nativised English Lexemes in Malaysian English (ME), and the conceptual framework of the study. These reviews are conducted critically and systematically in order to reach the main goal of the study which is to gain insights on Malaysian Third Culture Kids' (MTCKs') social connectedness with the Malaysian speech community through the perspective of sociolinguistics and cultural linguistics.

2.2 Third Culture Kids (TCKs)

This section discusses several most frequently cited theories and concepts of Third Culture Kids (TCKs) which begins with an introduction on the area of study, followed by a review on past literatures of TCKs and the issues they experience regarding to social connectedness and language.

2.2.1 The Origins of Third Culture Kids

The subject on Third Culture Kids (TCKs) was first introduced by American researchers, John and Ruth Useem in the 1950s, when businesses of international trade and affairs began to rise, offering many families the opportunity to transition to other countries and learn new cultures, especially for their children. Subsequently, this led to the existence of a global phenomenon among migrants, known as the Third Culture

Kids (TCKs) (Melles & Schwartz, 2013). According to Pollock and Van Reken (2009: p.13), “TCKs are expatriate children who spend substantial parts of their life away from their parents’ native culture and language”. Although the word “*kids*” is used, the term refers to both children and adults. The term “third” was derived from earlier studies of “first culture” which refers to the cultures that the parents originated and “second culture” which refers to the culture a family currently resides (Melles & Schwartz, 2013). “Third culture therefore, is the shared commonality among individuals that are living in an international mobile way of life” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009: p.13).

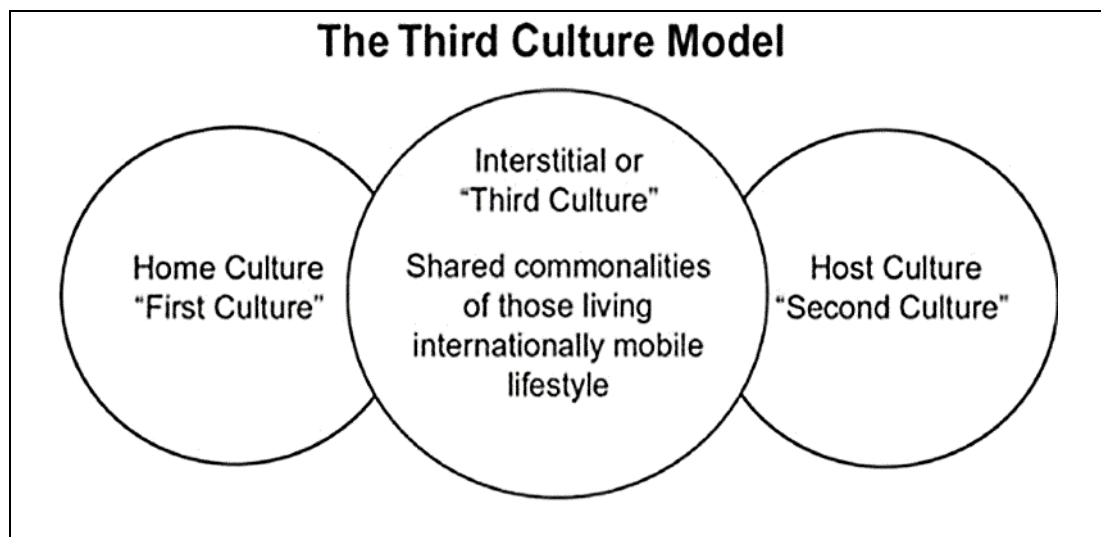


Figure 2.1 Third Culture Kids (TCK) Model (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009: p.14)

2.2.2 Review of Literature on Third Culture Kids (TCKs)

A review of literatures on Third Culture Kids (TCKs) shows that there are arguable debates on the advantages against disadvantages living in an international mobile way of life. Findings from Adams (2014) for example, reveal that TCKs are typically exposed to greater volumes of cultural influences compared to those who grow up in one cultural setting. Through video observations and interviews, Megan

Adams investigated seven children of expatriate families from the age of four to eight years old for a period of six months on their emotional journey in adapting to a new country, which is Malaysia. Adams explains that although much literature has focused on negative emotions during international transitions, her study shows that with the support of the family and teachers at school, positive emotions are also noticeable (Adams, 2014). Abundant research revealed that over time, TCKs eventually build strong characteristics because of their accustomed familiarity in adaptation and independence (Sheard, 2008; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Dewaele & Oudenhoven, 2009; Lyttle et al., 2011; Moore & Barker, 2012; Selmer & Luring, 2014; Miller, et. al., 2020; Jones et al., 2022).

A study by Moore and Barker (2012) revealed that older TCKs are particularly adept at building relationships with other cultures while not possessing a cultural identity of their own and perceive their experiences as mainly beneficial. The study examines aspects of cultural identity of TCKs using a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews among 19 participants from six different countries with various intercultural experiences. According to the researchers, although previous studies have indicated confused cultural identities among TCKs, their results show that TCK individuals are more apt to possess multiple cultural identities than a confused identity (Moore & Barker, 2012). Previous studies have also shown that adult TCKs establish expanded world-wide views that differ from a conventional way of thinking (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001) and have a unique wisdom of interpersonal sensitivity due to the effect of increased exposure of various perceptions and lifestyles which help TCKs monitor their emotions while registering societal norms and cues (Lyttle et al., 2011).

Since TCKs have been labelled as the ‘ideal expatriates’, Selmer and Luring (2014) conducted an investigation on the adjustment of self-initiated expatriate academics in Hong Kong by comparing adult TCKs with adult mono-cultural individuals. Through a survey of 267 participants, results of the findings showed that TCKs have higher levels of general adjustments compared to mono cultural individuals and develop qualities of cross-cultural intelligence because of their competence in communicating effectively with other nations, ethnics and organizations. According to Sheard (2008) because of their quality in cross-cultural competence, TCKs always know when and how to quickly adapt to appropriate behaviours in new environments and are generally found to be more tolerant among people of different cultures and backgrounds. Sheard’s qualitative study among non-American TCKs and American TCKs also revealed that both resulted in high positive levels of cultural acceptance, flexibility in cross-cultural communication, less prone to stereotypes, more open to learning new languages, and incredible skills in language acquisition.

These qualities mentioned by Sheard (2008), are found to have close connections to multilingualism. According to Dewaele and Oudenhoven (2009), multiculturalism and multilingualism have a strong positive relationship with TCKs’ personality profiles. The study investigates the link between multilingualism/multiculturalism, acculturation and the personality profile through a Multicultural Personality test of 70 teenagers from London in which half of them were TCKs. Statistical analysis revealed that TCKs who scored high levels of language dominance also showed high scores of open-mindedness and cultural empathy. These findings confirm that personality is shaped by social and biographical factors and although acculturation is stressful, the experience of being in contact with different languages

and cultures strengthens TCKs' personalities (Dewaele & Oudenhoven, (2009). In relation to Dewaele and Oudenhoven's study on language abilities among TCKs, is a study from Starr et al. (2017).

In their study, they examined the sociolinguistic development of local and expatriate children living in Singapore and examined the extent of which they share sociolinguistic knowledge and norms of the Singaporean society. A number of 114 children aged 5 to 19 completed a region identification task and an occupation judgement task, focusing on their perceptions of four regional English varieties. Their findings revealed that although both groups performed well on the region identification task among the four regional English varieties including Australian English, Northern-China accented English, Filipino English, and Singapore English, expatriate children were found to have greater knowledge on all the English varieties even amongst the youngest age group (Starr et al., 2017). Given the above studies, it is visible that TCKs gain profound benefits living in an international mobile way of life, especially in terms of sociolinguistic exposure and intercultural competence.

Despite the benefits and advantages TCKs gain, the review of literatures on TCKs shows that much of this current debate revolves around their developmental growth as findings reveal that the process of growing up within multiple environments often affects TCKs in many ways including their personal identity, values, attitude, characteristics, lifestyle and way of thinking. This is because, studies on the benefits and advantages of living in multiple environments and cultures is mostly seen later on as TCKs become adults, but is found to have caused many difficulties and pain during their process of adjustment towards adulthood. According to a study by Hervey (2009) who investigated on the correlation between patterns of transitions during TCKs'

childhood and their adjustment to college, the mix of influences from various cultures during their development growth often causes TCKs to become restless and rootless, which then causes disturbance to their processes of adjustment and transition towards adulthood. The notion is also agreed by Moore and Barker (2012).

According to Moore and Barker (2012) although adult TCKs are found to have strong and positive attitudes, the process of growing up as a TCK is extremely difficult and involves innumerable confusions. Findings reveal that as children, the situation to move between different cultures even before one could fully develop their own personal and cultural identity often cause TCKs to experience personal identity crisis, cultural value confusions, political confusions, difficulties of understanding local colloquial language, questions of belonging, culture shock, marginality, and dealings of grief upon change. Debates in the area also include ample studies emphasizing on the negative effects of TCKs' transitional process upon cultural adaptation and how it affects their values, characteristics, education, career, religion, knowledge of their own home nation's culture and language practices, mental state, emotional state, self-esteem and their relationships and social connectedness (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; 2009; Hoersting, 2010; Fail, Thompson, & Walker, 2004; Moore & Barker, 2012; Adams, 2014; Lily, 2014; Hisano, 2015; Long, 2016; Miller et al, 2020; Jones et al, 2022; Mizutani & Waalkes, 2023). Research on TCKs and the problems they face regarding to social connectedness and language is further discussed in the next section.

2.2.3 Third Culture Kids (TCKs) and Social Connectedness

According to Dashwood and Son (2011), connectedness includes both formal and informal relationships that affect individual and societal levels. Social connectedness therefore, describes the level of engagement and trust an individual has