3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature® The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies
Vol 32(2), June 2026 http://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2026-3202-15

The Formation, Usage, and Linguistic Features of Malaysian Standard English Borrowed Words in Social Media: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Social media can influence multiple linguistic levels of language use, but lexis is particularly sensitive and easily shaped by social contexts. This systematic literature review (SLR) synthesises studies on the formation, usage, and linguistic features of Malaysian Standard English (MSE) borrowed words in social media. 13 journal articles published between 2016 and 2025 were selected from Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science (WoS) based on predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. From an initial 437 results, only 13 met all criteria. The review shows that borrowing, semantic change, and nativisation are the main formation processes, while usage varies across social media platforms (SMP), helping to construct Malaysian identity and express solidarity among Malaysian social media users. Key linguistic features include American English (AmE) influence, code-switching, translanguaging, morpho-syntactic patterns, and discourse particles. Overall, the findings suggest that social media plays a significant role in lexical innovation in MSE, offering useful insights for media practitioners and research specialising in sociolinguistics, media linguistics, and digital anthropology.

Keywords: formation; lexical borrowing; linguistic features; social media; usage

INTRODUCTION

Distinct from the colloquial and basilectal nature of Manglish, Malaysian Standard English (MSE, also known as Malaysian English) is "a form of English used in Malaysia and is the lingua franca in Malaysia" (N. Ismail & Ramakrishnan, 2007, p. 3). In this definition, lingua franca is defined as "a common language or medium of communication between people of different mother tongues, for whom it is a second language" (Marlina & Xu, 2018, p. 4). Therefore, MSE is a language shared by Malaysians to engage globally, while Manglish is used locally. In sociolinguistics, lexical borrowing refers to "the process by which words are adapted into one language from another" (Holmes & Wilson, 2022, p. 679). In Malaysia's multilingual context, MSE frequently incorporates lexical items from both local (Tan, 2009a, 2009b; Zhiming et al., 2024) and international languages (Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023; Hashim et al., 2017). The rise of MSE borrowed words on SMPs has contributed to social cohesion and facilitated digital intercultural communication.

When it comes to digital communication, SMPs significantly shape the daily social practice, cultural communication, and customs of human society. Over the decades, they have become the primary tools for media consumers to interact, share information, and express themselves (Akhmedova, 2024). With increasing exposure to SMPs, Malaysians are using

borrowed words more frequently in online communication, prompting a growing body of research examing the formation, usage, and linguistic features of MSE borrowed words in social media. (Chew et al., 2024; Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023; Hadei et al., 2016; Hashim et al., 2017; M. Ismail & Abdullah, 2023; Nasir et al., 2023; Ng & Lee, 2019; Omar et al., 2020; Rashid et al., 2016; Serip, 2022; Tay et al., 2016; Ting & Yeo, 2019; Treffers-Daller et al., 2022).

However, researchers have tended to examine the formation, usage, and linguistic features of MSE borrowed words in social media separately, without fully synthesising studies. For instance, Gulnazir and Salehuddin (2023) focused more on formation, while Chew et al. (2024) studied the linguistic features. Although the study by Nasir et al. (2023) focused on usage and linguistic features at the same time, it did not scrutinise the formation of MSE borrowed words in social media. Therefore, a more all-around synthesis of studies on the formation, usage, and linguistic features of MSE borrowed words in social media appears to remain underdeveloped.

This review synthesises studies on the formation, usage, and linguistic features of MSE borrowed words in social media to provide an overview of current (2016-2025) lexical trends, explain how innovative MSE borrowed words emerge, and outline usage patterns of these borrowed words in digital communication. Moreover, this SLR may guide future researchers in further investigating language use at other linguistic levels across SMPs. Besides a sociolinguistic perspective, this review may also provide guidelines for future researchers in the field of media linguistics and digital anthropology to inform the relationship between media and language or explore the sociopolitical, socioeconomic, and sociocultural implications of using borrowed words in SMPs. Hence, this study conducts an SLR to identify the formation, usage, and linguistic features of MSE borrowed words in social media from existing studies by addressing the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: How are Malaysian Standard English borrowed words in social media formed?

RQ2: How are Malaysian Standard English borrowed words used in social media in communication?

RQ3: What are the linguistic features of the Malaysian Standard English borrowed words in social media?

To address the research questions, this SLR focuses on 13 research articles collected from 3 databases (Google Scholar, Scopus, and WoS), using thematic synthesis as a data analysis method. Before addressing the methodology of this review, some key terms involved in the review will be conceptualised in the next section.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE KEY TERMS

The term "formation", as defined by Karlygash et al. (2023), is the way of forming words of a language. In this SLR, "formation" means the ways in which the MSE borrowed words are produced or created in social media. "Usage" is the regulated way in which words or phrases are used, spoken, or written in a speech community (Nordquist, 2019). In this definition, "speech community" is defined as a term used to describe a group of people who share the same language, speech characteristics, and ways of interpreting communication (Nordquist, 2025). Therefore, the speech community in this review is Malaysians who engage with digital communication with the globe, so the focus of "usage" concentrates on how MSE borrowed words in written social media are used. Thirdly, "linguistic features" have been defined as "the use of sentence construction,

grammar, and mechanical aspects of writing" (Budiharso, 2006, p. 1). While linguistic features primarily refer to grammatical and pragmatic characteristics of borrowed lexical items, this SLR also includes related multilingual discourse practices such as code-switching and translanguaging, which are not features of borrowing in a strict sense but reflect the broader multilingual discourse environments in which borrowed lexical items occur.

In this review, the terms "code-switching" and "translanguaging" also somewhat align with lexical borrowing, although they are analytically distinct phenomena in sociolinguistics. Holmes and Wilson (2022) defined code-switching as "use of more than one language during a conversation" (p. 670) and defined translanguaging as "the process of fluidly using multiple semiotic resources to maximise communication" (p. 691). In this SLR, lexical borrowing is the main focus, specifically lexical items that have undergone adaptation or localisation in MSE in the social media context. Hence, the scope of this review is narrowed to borrowed lexical items, rather than all instances of multilingual language use. As a result, code-switching and translanguaging are not treated as forms of borrowing but as contextual multilingual practices that may accompany the occurrence of these lexical items.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This SLR adopted a qualitative research design, which refers to "research that emphasises words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data" (Clark et al., 2022, p. 549). SLR principles, including transparent search strategies, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, multi-reviewer screening, and quality appraisal, are followed to ensure methodological rigour. This review is deductive in nature, guided by three themes: 1) formation, 2) usage, and 3) linguistic features of MSE borrowed words in social media. A total of 13 journal articles published between 2016 and 2025 were systematically selected from Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science using Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021), including the identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion stages, which aligns with prior SLRs in language studies (Zakaria et al., 2021).

IDENTIFICATION

To select appropriate articles for review, 3 databases (Google Scholar, Scopus, and WoS) were used because similar multi-database search strategies have been adopted in previous SLRs in language studies (Zakaria et al., 2021). Google Scholar was used to broaden the coverage of the search results, particularly in sociolinguistics and digital communication, where relevant studies may not yet be indexed in Scopus or WoS. This approach aligns with prior SLR practices in interdisciplinary fields, but it may affect the quality of the selected articles, which has been acknowledged as one limitation of this SLR. To mitigate potential quality concerns, all included studies underwent a structured quality appraisal process after the inclusion stage.

Due to the different functions of the databases, different search strings were used to link the keywords. Table 1 below presents the search strings used in each database.

TABLE 1 Search Strings used in the Database

Database	Search string
Google Scholar	("Malaysian English" OR "Malaysian Standard English") AND ("lexical borrowing" OR loanword* OR "lexical innovation" OR code-switching OR "language mixing" OR nativisation OR "lexical change" OR "language contact") AND ("digital communication" OR "online discourse" OR "internet communication" OR "computer-mediated communication" OR CMC OR Facebook OR Twitter OR Instagram OR TikTok OR WhatsApp OR "online platform*") AND ((formation OR formulation OR establishment OR emergence) OR (usage OR use OR application) OR ("linguistic feature*" OR "linguistic structure*" OR "syntactic feature*" OR "morphological feature*"))
Scopus	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("Malaysian English" OR "Malaysian Standard English") AND ("lexical borrowing" OR loanword* OR "lexical innovation" OR code-switching OR "language mixing" OR nativisation OR "lexical change" OR "language contact") AND ("digital communication" OR "online discourse" OR "internet communication" OR "computer-mediated communication" OR CMC OR Facebook OR Twitter OR Instagram OR TikTok OR WhatsApp OR "online platform*") AND ((formation OR formulation OR establishment OR emergence) OR (usage OR use OR application) OR ("linguistic feature*" OR "linguistic structure*" OR "syntactic feature*" OR "morphological feature*")))
WoS	TS=(("Malaysian English" OR "Malaysian Standard English") AND ("lexical borrowing" OR loanword* OR "lexical innovation" OR code-switching OR "language mixing" OR nativisation OR "lexical change" OR "language contact") AND ("digital communication" OR "online discourse" OR "internet communication" OR "computer-mediated communication" OR CMC OR Facebook OR Twitter OR Instagram OR TikTok OR WhatsApp OR "online platform*") AND ((formation OR formulation OR establishment OR emergence) OR (usage OR use OR application) OR ("linguistic feature*" OR "linguistic structure*" OR "syntactic feature*" OR "morphological feature*")))

Overall, 437 articles (including duplicates) were identified in total at the identification stage from Google Scholar (n=427), Scopus (n=4), and WoS (n=6).

SCREENING

Due to the limited results obtained from Scopus and WoS, researchers easily found that 2 articles were not published after 2016, and 2 articles were not in English from Scopus and WoS, so 4 articles were removed at this stage before reviewing the abstracts and full-texts. For Google Scholar, its functions cannot limit the articles to document type and language, so the screening of the articles from Google Scholar was conducted manually to identify the articles by screening the title at this stage. The screening process was conducted by two independent reviewers based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Any discrepancies in judgment were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. This collaborative process aimed to enhance the consistency and reliability of the screening stage. Eventually, 14 articles from Google Scholar were selected after screening the titles. Therefore, there were 20 articles selected to assess eligibility in the next stage.

ELIGIBILITY

After the screening stage, the abstracts and full texts of the remaining articles were assessed for eligibility based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Similar to the screening stage, the eligibility assessment of the 20 articles was also done by two independent reviewers. While assessing eligibility, two reviewers also discussed any disagreements involved in the process and reached a consensus eventually. At last, both reviewers agreed that 16 of the 20 articles should be considered for the review.

The inclusion criteria are:

1. Articles were published between 2016 and 2025 and written in English.
2. Articles were situated in the Malaysian context and examined MSE lexical items / borrowed words in social media contexts.
3. Articles addressed at least one of the following aspects of MSE lexical items: formation, usage, or linguistic features.

The exclusion criteria are:

1. Articles published before 2016 or not written in English.
2. Articles that were not journal articles, such as review papers, conference proceedings, theses, dissertations, preprints, conceptual papers, and policy documents.
3. Articles not focused on the Malaysian context or not related to the social media context.
4. Articles discussing code-switching and translanguaging without clear relevance to MSE lexical items / borrowed words or without findings related to formation, usage, or linguistic features.

INCLUSION

At last, 3 duplicates were removed from the 16 articles, resulting in 13 articles selected for SLR. Figure 1 illustrates the flow diagram of the article selection process adapted from the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram template.

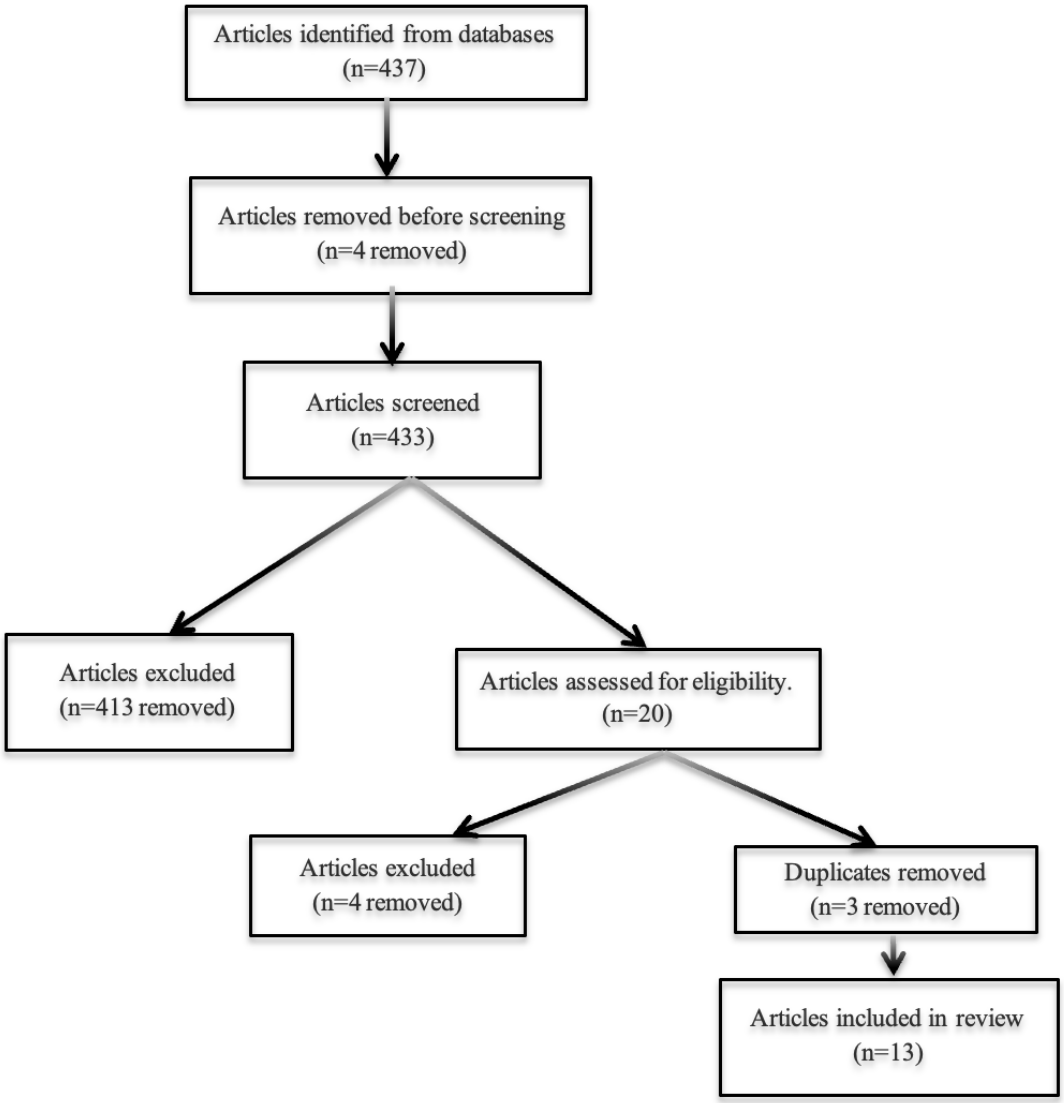

FIGURE 1. Flow Diagram of Article Selection Process

To enhance methodological rigour, a quality appraisal was conducted for all 13 included articles. Each article was evaluated based on four criteria: clarity of research aims, appropriateness of methodology, transparency of data collection and analysis, and relevance to the research questions of this SLR. The appraisal process was also done independently by both reviewers, who reached full agreement that all selected studies met the 4 criteria.

Although two reviewers were involved in the screening and eligibility stages, inter-rater reliability statistics such as Cohen's kappa were not calculated, which may limit the transparency of the review. Nevertheless, reliability was ensured through independent screening, eligibility assessment, coding, and quality appraisal, followed by discussions between the two reviewers to reach consensus. The consensus-based procedures are commonly employed in SLR, where interpretive agreement is prioritised over statistical measures of reliability.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic synthesis applies thematic analysis to integrate findings across studies and derive an overall understanding (Clark et al., 2022). This SLR followed the three stages of thematic synthesis proposed by Thomas et al. (2012). Firstly, coding the text. The findings from 13 articles were coded line-by-line to identify key aspects of the formation, usage, and linguistic features of MSE borrowed words in social media. Two reviewers conducted the coding independently and reached consensus on 11 codes. Secondly, generating descriptive themes. The codes were grouped into three descriptive themes: formation, usage, and linguistic features, aligned with the research questions as shown in Table 3. Finally, generating analytic themes. Analytic themes were developed by comparing codes across studies within each theme to generate broader sociolinguistic insights. For example, five codes under linguistic features informed the analytic theme "dynamic multilingual convergence", highlighting the influence of global linguistic features on MSE vocabulary and suggesting directions for future research.

RESULTS

OVERVIEW OF THE SELECTED ARTICLES

Before illustrating the themes and codes identified in this review, some basic information (including article name, publication year, author(s), method(s), and theoretical framework(s)) about the 13 selected articles is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Overview of the Selected Articles

Article Name	Publication Year	Author(s)	Study Type	Method(s)	Theoretical Framework(s)
Is WhatsApp the future of workplace communication? Investigating the use of WhatsApp in decision-making episodes	2020	Omar, N. A. M.; Azmi, N. J.	Qualitative	Discourse analysis	Discourse analysis in workplace communication by Boden (1994)
English language teachers as a dissenting opinion on a social networking site	2016	Ab Rashid, R.; Wahab, Z.; Yunus, K.; Ismail, N. S.; Yusof, N.; Omar, S. N. M. S.	Qualitative	Discourse analysis	Discursive identity construction by Fairclough (1992)
Translanguaging practices and identity construction of multilingual Malaysian university graduates in digital media	2019	Ng, L. L.; Lee, S. L.	Qualitative	Discourse analysis	Translanguaging by García (2009); Identity theory by Bucholtz and Hall (2005)
Unravelling the linguistic features of Facebook comments amidst live press conferences	2024	Chew, S. Y.; Jiang, J. T. J.; Soh, S. B.	Mixed-methods	Corpus + discourse analysis	Netspeak features by Crystal (2001, 2004, 2006)
Functions of code switching in youth WhatsApp chats	2022	Serip, N. H. M.	Qualitative	Discourse analysis	Code-switching functions by Gumperz (1982)
An Analysis of Code-Switching in Hitz FM Instagram Comments	2023	Ismail, M. 'I.; Abdullah, N. E.	Qualitative	Discourse analysis	Code-switching typology by Poplack (1980)
Code-switching Functions in Facebook Wallposts	2019	Ting, S.-H.; Yeo, D. K.-L.	Qualitative	Discourse analysis	Code-switching functions by Gumperz (1982)

The Use and Features of Malaysian English Lexemes as Social Media Hashtags	2023	Nasir, N. F. W. M.; Rahim, H. A.; How, C.	Mixed-methods	Corpus + qualitative analysis	World Englishes by Kachru (1985); Lexical innovation by Schneider (2007)
Uncovering the Lexical Variation and Change in Malaysian English: A Corpus-Driven Analysis	2023	Gulnazir, N.; Salehuddin, K.	Mixed-methods	Corpus-driven analysis	Corpus linguistics by Biber et al. (1998); World Englishes by Kachru (1985)
Explaining the Diversity in Malay-English Code-Switching Patterns: The Contribution of Typological Similarity and Bilingual Optimisation Strategies	2022	Treffers-Daller, J.; Majid, S.; Thai, Y. N.,; Flynn, N.	Qualitative	Comparative linguistic analysis	Bilingual optimisation strategies by Muysken (2000)
Social Factors for Code-Switching: A Study of Malaysian-English Bilingual Speakers	2016	Hadei, M.; Kumar, V. C. K.; Jie, K. S.	Qualitative	Sociolinguistic analysis	Social factors in code-switching by Myers-Scotton (1993)
Linguistic Features of Malaysian Students' Online Communicative Language in an Academic Setting: The Case of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	2017	Hashim, F.; Soopar, A. A.; Hamid, B. A.	Qualitative	Discourse analysis	Netspeak features by Crystal (2001)
Discourse Particles in Malaysian English: What Do They Mean?	2016	Tay, L. C.; Chan, M. Y.; Yap, N. T.; Wong, B. E.	Qualitative	Discourse analysis	Discourse analysis by Schiffrin (1987)

Overall, 3 of the 13 studies used mixed-methods approaches, and 10 of them were qualitative in nature. Regarding the theoretical frameworks, 2 studies (Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023; Nasir et al., 2023) employed World Englishes proposed by Kachru (1985) and 2 studies (Serip, 2022; Ting & Yeo, 2019) used code-switching functions by Gumperz (1982).

ANSWERS TO RQ1: FORMATION OF MSE BORROWED WORDS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

BORROWING

Based on the morphological processes by Murray (1995), Shahlee and Ahmad (2020) illustrated that borrowing is "Words from one language are used in another with or without some phonological and autographic changes" (p. 2527). In this review, borrowing was one of the codes identified from the 13 articles relevant to the formation of MSE borrowed words in social media. 6 studies (Hadei et al., 2016; Hashim et al., 2017; M. Ismail & Abdullah, 2023; Nasir et al., 2023; Ting & Yeo, 2019; Treffers-Daller et al., 2022) addressed borrowing as a key process. For example, the word "penyelia" (supervisor in Malay) was used in MSE for online academic discussions (Hashim et al., 2017).

SEMANTIC CHANGE

Khalid (2020) defined semantic change as the process of "words change their meaning over time" (p. 44), and there are five types (narrowing, widening, amelioration, pejoration, and verbicide) of semantic change summarised by Katamba (2005). In this review, widening (the process of increasing the number of lexemes with distinct meanings associated with a word form) and amelioration (the process by which a word acquires a more positive meaning) were involved in

one selected article (Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023). Therefore, semantic change was another code identified in the first stage of the thematic synthesis, characterised under the descriptive theme "formation of MSE borrowed words in social media".

In the study by Gulnazir and Salehuddin (2023), "lit" and "on fleek" were listed as examples of MSE borrowed words in Twitter by Gulnazir and Salehuddin (2023). These two words were borrowed from AmE with changes in meaning on Malaysian Twitter. In 2013, when these two terms just emerged in American Twitter, "lit" meant "to illuminate light and ignite fire", while "on fleek" was used to describe eyebrows that look good and on point. However, in 2018, the meaning of "lit" was widened and ameliorated to positively describe people on Malaysian Twitter. Also, "on fleek" was widened to describe eyebrows, hair, and a cosmetic look good and on point in Malaysian Twitter in 2015. Overall, semantic change, specifically widening and amelioration, was involved in the formation of MSE borrowed words in social media like Twitter. In the process of formation, words widened or ameliorated their original meanings from adapted language to suit the needs of digital communication in the Malaysian context.

NATIVISATION

According to Nasir (2021), nativisation is the process of losing the original colonial British meaning of English words and acquiring new localised meanings. In this research, nativisation was also one of the codes generated from the selected articles related to the formation of MSE borrowed words in social media, though there was only one article that mentioned this formation process (Nasir et al., 2023). Nasir et al. (2023) discovered that "best" and "on" were two MSE lexical items most frequently used in Facebook and Instagram hashtags. However, the meanings of these two lexical items were different from the original meaning of British English. For example, one hashtag found in Nasir et al. (2023)'s study was "#bestgiler". In this hashtag, "best" meant "lucky" or "great", different from the original meaning "the most excellent". Therefore, this hashtag expressed "crazily lucky" or "insanely great" since "giler" was adapted from the Malay language (original form is "gila"), which meant "crazy" or "insane". All in all, nativisation was involved in the formation of some parts ("best") of the hashtag "#bestgiler".

To sum up, the selected articles demonstrate a consistent pattern in the formation of MSE borrowed words, particularly through processes such as borrowing, semantic change and nativisation. Across the studies, there is strong agreement that borrowed items are not merely transferred but are actively reshaped to fit local linguistic norms. However, the studies vary in the extent to which these processes are systematically analysed, with some adopting detailed linguistic frameworks while others provide more descriptive accounts. This variation reflects differences in methodological approaches and analytical depth, but collectively the findings highlight the dynamic and adaptive nature of borrowing in Malaysian social media contexts.

ANSWERS TO RQ2: USAGE OF MSE BORROWED WORDS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

PLATFORM-BASED USAGE

The usage of the MSE borrowed words varies according to the use of SMPs. From the selected articles, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram were the most popular three SMPs investigated by the researchers. However, noticeable differences in terms of MSE borrowed words usage were found based on 5 selected articles (Chew et al., 2024; Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023; M. Ismail & Abdullah, 2023; Nasir et al., 2023; Omar et al., 2020).

For instance, Twitter features semantic shifts like "lit" and "on fleek" (Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023), while Instagram and Facebook favour hashtags (Nasir et al., 2023), and WhatsApp supports decision-making via code-switching (Omar et al., 2020). Thus, platform-based usage emerged as a code for contextual adaptation.

IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

5 of the selected studies discussed that Malaysian people used MSE borrowed words in social media to construct or showcase their identity (Chew et al., 2024; Hadei et al., 2016; Hashim et al., 2017; Ng & Lee, 2019; Rashid et al., 2016). According to Chew et al. (2024), displaying identity was one of the important factors that led Malaysians to use translanguaging in Facebook communication to comment on a live stream during COVID-19. Chew et al. (2024) used the definition from Park (2013) to elaborate the concept of translanguaging, stating that "translanguaging refers to the alternation between two or more languages or language varieties in the same conversation" (Chew et al., 2024, p. 69). Therefore, in this process, borrowing was potentially involved in the translanguaging process to form MSE borrowed words in Facebook communication, as discussed earlier in the formation section. One example provided by Chew et al. (2024) was the Facebook comment "Yes, pls tutup sekolah". In this comment, "tutup sekolah" was a Malay word used to respond to others' suggestions about closing school. As a result, the use of MSE words borrowed from the Malay language aimed to display identity (Chew et al., 2024). Hashim et al. (2017) also discovered examples (e.g. "I am proud of you…sek kitoww*name of poster") of using MSE borrowed words to show common in-group affiliation and identity marker for Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) students when responding on Facebook. All in all, identity construction was also a code identified from the selected articles for the usage of MSE borrowed words in social media.

SOLIDARITY EXPRESSION

MSE borrowed words, often through code-switching and discourse particles, express solidarity and empathy among users in social media interactions. This descriptive code was identified in 3 articles (Chew et al., 2024; Rashid et al., 2016; Tay et al., 2016). In the context of live press conferences on Facebook, discourse particles and translanguaging practices foster communal bonds by signalling agreement, support, or shared understanding among commenters, particularly during discussions on public issues like the Covid-19 pandemic (Chew et al., 2024). For example, a comment such as "Betul lah, we need to stay safe together" borrows the Malay particle "lah" to soften the assertion and emphasise collective empathy, thereby strengthening interpersonal ties in real-time digital exchanges. Moreover, discourse particles in MSE specifically function to mitigate face-threatening acts and enhance solidarity by conveying politeness or shared sentiment (Tay et al., 2016). Examples include particles like "lah" in "It's okay lah, we all make mistakes", which softens reassurance and fosters empathetic connections in everyday online exchanges. All in all, solidarity expression illustrates how MSE borrowed words contribute to building trust, empathy, and social harmony in digital communication environments.

The reviewed articles indicate that the usage of borrowed words in Malaysian social media may serve multiple overlapping functions, most notably facilitating communicative efficiency and expressing social identity. There is broad similarity across studies in recognising the role of borrowing in signalling group affiliation, cultural belonging, and informality in digital

communication. However, the emphasis placed on specific functions varies depending on the research focus and data type, with corpus-based studies tending to highlight frequency and distribution, while qualitative studies foreground pragmatic and sociocultural meanings. This suggests that the functions of borrowing are context-dependent and may be associated with both linguistic and social factors.

ANSWERS TO RQ3: LINGUISTIC FEATURES OF MSE BORROWED WORDS IN SOCIAL MEDIA

USE OF AMERICAN FEATURES

In this SLR, researchers have found that the examples presented in this section, such as borrowed lexical items, discourse particles, hashtags, and orthographic variants, operate at different linguistic levels. To enhance analytical precision, the linguistic elements identified in this review are categorised into distinct analytical levels:

1. lexical level (borrowed words such as “lit”, “on fleek”)
2. morpho-syntactic level (e.g. hybrid forms such as “#lahfood”)
3. pragmatic level (e.g. discourse particles such as “lah”, “meh”)
4. orthographic level (e.g. American spellings such as “decolonized”)
5. discourse level (e.g. hashtags such as “#followbelakang”)

While these categories are analytically distinct, they are discussed together to reflect how MSE borrowed words are realised in social media contexts.

As addressed in the earlier section, 2 studies (Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023; Hashim et al., 2017) from the selected articles mentioned the use of American features in MSE borrowed words. The two MSE borrowed words (“lit” and “on fleek”) discussed by Gulnazir and Salehuddin (2023) were all borrowed from AmE. Besides the borrowing of American words, American spellings (e.g. “decolonized” and “any one”) were also found in MSE used in SMPs (Hashim et al., 2017). Therefore, the AmE features were identified at both semantic and orthographic levels. As a result, the use of American features was a code generated from the 13 selected articles for the linguistic features of MSE borrowed words in social media.

CODE-SWITCHING

8 studies (Hadei et al., 2016; Hashim et al., 2017; M. Ismail & Abdullah, 2023; Nasir et al., 2023; Omar et al., 2020; Serip, 2022; Ting & Yeo, 2019; Treffers-Daller et al., 2022) from the selected articles mentioned the use of code-switching in MSE borrowed words in social media. Code-switching frequently incorporates Malay borrowings into English texts on SMPs. For example, Malaysians used short-string forms of the hashtags like “#+code-switching” (e.g. “#followbelakang”, where “belakang” means back in Malay) (Nasir et al., 2023). Therefore, in this review, although code-switching is one of the codes under the theme “linguistic features of MSE borrowed words in social media”, it is understood as a multilingual discourse practice in which borrowed lexical items may be embedded rather than a grammatical or pragmatic feature of borrowing, reflecting the broader multilingual environment of MSE social media communication.

TRANSLANGUAGING

This code appeared in 2 of the 13 selected articles (Chew et al., 2024; Ng & Lee, 2019). During COVID-19 live press conferences on Facebook, Malaysian netizens employed translanguaging to enhance rhetorical flow and cultural resonance, such as in the comment "Yes, pls tutup sekolah", where "tutup sekolah" (close school in Malay) uses Malay as MSE borrowed words to emphasise urgency and solidarity in discussions about public health measures (Chew et al., 2024). Similar to code-switching, in this review, translanguaging is treated as a multilingual discourse practice that provides a communicative context in which borrowed lexical items are used. Hence, it is also not a grammatical or pragmatic feature of the borrowed words, highlighting the fluid multilingual environment of MSE social media discourse.

MORPHO-SYNTACTIC FEATURES OF THE BORROWED WORDS

Morpho-syntactic features of borrowed words involve the blending of grammatical structures from different languages, adapting morphology and syntax to fit concise digital demands. This code was discovered in 5 articles (Chew et al., 2024; Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023; Hashim et al., 2017; Nasir et al., 2023; Treffers-Daller et al., 2022). In social media hashtags, morpho-syntactic adaptations create hybrid forms like "#lahfood", where the Malay discourse particle "lah" blends as a bound morpheme with the English word "food" to denote emphatic or localised Malaysian cuisine, illustrating blending and nativisation processes (Nasir et al., 2023). Hence, morpho-syntactic features were also a significant code found from the 13 selected articles for linguistic features of MSE borrowed words in social media.

DISCOURSE PARTICLES

Discourse particles add pragmatic nuances to utterances, conveying attitudes, emotions, or interpersonal relations without altering core propositional meaning. This code was identified in 3 articles (Hashim et al., 2017; Nasir et al., 2023; Tay et al., 2016). In MSE, particles like "lah", "meh", and "lor" serve multiple functions, such as "lah" for emphasis or mitigation in the previous example "It's okay lah, we all make mistakes", softening reassurance to foster politeness and solidarity, or "meh" for skepticism in "Really meh?" questioning assertions with a confrontational tone (Tay et al., 2016). Moreover, social media hashtags incorporate particles for expressive localisation, as in "#lahfood" addressed earlier, where "lah" blends with "food" to evoke casual enthusiasm or cultural familiarity, highlighting pragmatic adaptation in digital trends (Nasir et al., 2023). All in all, discourse particles were identified as another significant code for the theme's linguistic features.

Across the reviewed articles, several recurring linguistic features of borrowed words can be identified, including American features, morpho-syntactic features, and discourse particles. There is general agreement on these core features as indicators of borrowing processes. However, the inclusion and treatment of phenomena such as code-switching and translanguaging vary considerably among studies, with some researchers incorporating them as related features and others treating them as distinct multilingual practices. This inconsistency reflects broader conceptual differences in how borrowing is defined and operationalised in the literature. Overall, the findings suggest that while certain grammatical and pragmatic features are consistently recognised, the boundaries between borrowing and multilingual practices like code-switching and translanguaging remain fluid in social media contexts.

TABLE 3. Themes and Codes Identified in the SLR

Descriptive Themes	Codes	Descriptions	Examples
Formation of MSE borrowed words in social media	Borrowing	Adoption of words from other languages with possible adaptations	"Penyelia" (supervisor in Malay) was used in MSE for online academic discussions (Hashim et al., 2017)
	Semantic change	Shifts in word meanings over time	"Lit" widened to mean exciting on Twitter (Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023)
	Nativisation	Acquisition of localised meanings	"#Bestgiler" meaning crazily lucky (Nasir et al., 2023)
Usage of MSE borrowed words in social media	Platform-based usage	Variations in word use across different platforms	Code-switching is more frequent in WhatsApp for decisions (Omar et al., 2020)
	Identity construction	Building and displaying personal or group identities	Translanguaging for multilingual identity in digital media (Ng & Lee, 2019)
	Solidarity expression	Expressing empathy and group bonds	Discourse particles for communal support in comments (Chew et al., 2024)
	Use of American features	Incorporation of American semantics and orthography	"On fleek" for appearances (Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023)
Linguistic features of MSE borrowed words in social media	Code-switching	Multilingual discourse practice in which borrowed lexical items may be embedded.	"#followbelakang", where "belakang" means back in Malay (Nasir et al., 2023)
	Translanguaging	Fluid multilingual resource use provides context for lexical borrowing	"Yes, pls tutup sekolah", where "tutup sekolah" (close school in Malay) uses Malay as MSE borrowed words to emphasise urgency and solidarity in discussions about public health measures (Chew et al., 2024).
	Morpho-syntactic features of the borrowed words	Blending grammatical structures	Typological similarity in code-switching patterns (Treffers-Daller et al., 2022)
	Discourse particles	Adding pragmatic nuances	"Lah" for emphasis and attitude (Tay et al., 2016)

Table 3 above presents all the descriptive themes and codes involved in this SLR to support the above interpretation. In the next section, the findings will be critically discussed, and the interpretation of analytic themes will also be addressed.

DISCUSSION

This SLR shows that the formation, usage, and linguistic features of MSE borrowed words in social media are influenced by both linguistic and social factors in Malaysia's multilingual norm. The findings reveal that borrowing, semantic change, and nativisation are the major formation processes that form MSE borrowed words in SMPs. Across the selected studies, borrowing is consistently identified as the most common process (Hadei et al., 2016; Hashim et al., 2017; Nasir et al., 2023), suggesting a shared pattern in how lexical items are incorporated into MSE. However, there are some differences in how studies interpret related phenomena, particularly in distinguishing borrowing from multilingual practices such as code-switching and translanguaging (M. Ismail & Abdullah, 2023; Ting & Yeo, 2019; Treffers-Daller et al., 2022). These similarities and differences indicate that while the formation processes are widely recognised, their conceptual boundaries are not always treated consistently across studies.

The studies involved in the review also show that semantic change and nativisation contribute to the creative development of new MSE borrowed words in social media. Words borrowed from AmE, such as "lit" and "on fleek", have gone through widening and amelioration of meaning on Malaysian Twitter. These words are no longer used in the same way as in AmE but

are used to express excitement or admiration in Malaysian online communication (Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023). Nativisation, on the other hand, involves giving local meanings to existing English words. For example, in the hashtag "#bestgiler", the word "best" no longer means "the most excellent" but takes on the meaning of "lucky" or "great" in Malaysian social media (Nasir et al., 2023). These examples suggest that the formation of MSE borrowed words in social media is a continuous process of combining local culture and global influence, creating new expressions that represent Malaysian identity.

From these findings, the analytic theme "interdependent lexical hybridisation" can be interpreted. According to the selected articles, there is a recurring pattern that MSE borrowed words in social media are formed through the interaction of borrowing, semantic change, and nativisation rather than through a single isolated process (Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023; Hadei et al., 2016; Hashim et al., 2017; Nasir et al., 2023). In particular, the studies by Gulnazir and Salehuddin (2023) and Nasir et al. (2023) show that borrowed lexical items are often further reshaped through widening and nativisation, indicating that lexical borrowing in MSE is evolving and context-sensitive. However, the selected articles also differ in how they distinguish borrowing from code-switching and translanguaging (M. Ismail & Abdullah, 2023; Ting & Yeo, 2019; Treffers-Daller et al., 2022). This suggests that while hybridisation is consistently noticeable across the studies, its conceptual boundaries are not always treated in the same way. Therefore, the theme "interdependent lexical hybridisation" reflects both a shared cross-study pattern in the co-occurrence of formation processes and a continuing need for greater analytical precision in distinguishing lexical borrowing from code-switching and translanguaging.

To sum up, this review addressed RQ1 by discovering that the MSE borrowed words are normally formed through borrowing, semantic change, and nativisation processes.

Moreover, the usage of MSE borrowed words in social media depends largely on the functions and purposes of different platforms. The review shows that users on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp apply MSE borrowed words differently to suit the communication style of each platform. This pattern is consistently observed across studies (Chew et al., 2024; Nasir et al., 2023; Omar et al., 2020), although the extent of variation reported depends on the methodological focus of each study. In addition, most studies emphasise identity construction and solidarity expression (Chew et al., 2024; Hadei et al., 2016; Hashim et al., 2017; Ng & Lee, 2019; Rashid et al., 2016; Tay et al., 2016), but relatively few compare how different user groups or platforms shape these functions, indicating a gap in the literature.

These observations reflect the analytic theme "contextual pragmatic flexibility". The findings of the review demonstrate broad agreement that the usage of MSE borrowed words in social media is shaped by communicative purpose, platform affordances, and social relationships (Chew et al., 2024; Nasir et al., 2023; Omar et al., 2020). The studies also converge in showing that borrowed words are frequently used for identity construction and solidarity expression in multilingual online interaction (Hadei et al., 2016; Hashim et al., 2017; Ng & Lee, 2019; Rashid et al., 2016; Tay et al., 2016). However, the extent to which these functions are highlighted differs across studies, partly because some focus more on platform-specific language practices, while others emphasise interpersonal meaning or identity performance. In addition, relatively few of the selected studies make direct comparisons across platforms or user groups, which limits a fuller understanding of how these pragmatic functions vary in different Malaysian social media contexts. Therefore, the theme "contextual pragmatic flexibility" captures a clear pattern in the adaptable use of MSE borrowed words, while also pointing to the need for more comparative research on how platform and community contexts shape lexical usage.

Overall, RQ2 can be addressed by suggesting that MSE borrowed words are used in social media to demonstrate platform-based usage, construct identity, and express solidarity.

In terms of linguistic features, MSE borrowed words in social media show strong evidence of global and local influence. The use of AmE features and local features is widely reported across studies (Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023; Hashim et al., 2017; Tay et al., 2016), indicating a general convergence of linguistic resources. However, differences can be seen in how studies treat code-switching, translanguaging, and borrowing, with some studies analysing them together while others distinguish them more clearly, as discussed earlier (M. Ismail & Abdullah, 2023; Ting & Yeo, 2019; Treffers-Daller et al., 2022). This suggests that the interpretation of linguistic features varies depending on the analytical approach.

Morpho-syntactic features in "#lahfood" or "STAY HOME lah" show how MSE borrowed words are adapted to social media's fast and concise communication style (Chew et al., 2024; Nasir et al., 2023;). This combination of grammar and vocabulary from different languages may contribute to a more dynamic and expressive usage of MSE in the social media context. Similarly, discourse particles help to soften tones, express emotions, and create natural flow in digital messages. These features may be seen as characteristics of how MSE combines international and local linguistic features in digital communication.

All in all, these linguistic features mirror the analytic theme "dynamic multilingual convergence" as mentioned in the previous section. Based on the findings of this SLR, there is a recurring pattern in the sense that MSE borrowed words in social media are shaped by the convergence of global and local linguistic features, particularly through the incorporation of AmE features, local semantic adaptation, morpho-syntactic blending, and discourse particles (Gulnazir & Salehuddin, 2023; Hashim et al., 2017; Nasir et al., 2023; Tay et al., 2016). At the same time, the selected articles do not treat all multilingual phenomena in the same way. In particular, some studies discuss code-switching and translanguaging together with borrowing, whereas others distinguish them more clearly as multilingual discourse practices that provide the context in which borrowed lexical items occur (Chew et al., 2024; M. Ismail & Abdullah, 2023; Ting & Yeo, 2019; Treffers-Daller et al., 2022). This variation suggests that multilingual convergence is consistently present in the selected articles, but its analytical scope depends on the framework adopted by each study. Therefore, the theme "dynamic multilingual convergence" not only captures the multilingual character of MSE social media discourse but also highlights the need for a clearer categorisation of lexical features and broader discourse practices in future research. Hence, RQ3 is answered by the 5 linguistic features (American features, code-switching, translanguaging, morpho-syntactic features, and discourse particles) of MSE borrowed words in social media found in the review.

Overall, the findings of this SLR indicate that the formation, usage, and linguistic features of MSE borrowed words in social media are closely related. Across the studies, similar patterns can be observed, such as the frequent use of borrowing and the role of these words in identity construction and solidarity expression. At the same time, the reviewed studies vary in how concepts such as code-switching and translanguaging are defined and analysed. Nonetheless, most studies focus on specific time periods or SMPs, with limited attention to studies emphasising change over time or comparisons across platforms. These gaps point to the potential value of longitudinal and comparative studies in future research.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, borrowing, semantic change, and nativisation are the main formation processes, facilitating the integration of global and local linguistic features in online MSE. Usage varies across platforms and is closely linked to identity construction and solidarity expression, as seen in Twitter's semantic shifts and Facebook's language mixing. Key linguistic features include AmE influence, code-switching, translanguaging, morpho-syntactic patterns, and discourse particles, reflecting ongoing linguistic change in multilingual digital communication. These findings contribute to sociolinguistics, media linguistics, and digital anthropology by highlighting the relationship between media and language. The findings also suggest practical implications for media practitioners, educators, and policymakers in promoting effective and inclusive digital communication. Future research might better examine emerging platforms such as TikTok, conduct longitudinal corpus-based studies to trace lexical change over time, and compare MSE with other English varieties to identify broader trends in online borrowing. Further exploration of additional linguistic levels, such as phonology and syntax, would also deepen understanding of how digital communication shapes MSE.

Overall, social media functions as a dynamic linguistic space where Malaysian identity and English evolve together. The hybridisation of language observed in these contexts may point to broader patterns of sociolinguistic adaptability within Malaysia's multilingual digital environment. While this SLR does not provide direct empirical evidence to support wider societal claims, it highlights how emerging linguistic practices invite further reflection on the relationship between language, identity, and digital communication. A more nuanced understanding of these developments, therefore, may contribute to future discussions on how Malaysia navigates its multicultural linguistic heritage while engaging with global communication networks.

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