The Use and Features of Malaysian English Lexemes as Social Media Hashtags

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Abstract. Social media has changed the way societies all over the world communicate in this modern age. Studies on this research area have shown that of the various forms available, hashtags (#) have a higher means of attraction, as they often produce social media trends and innovative linguistic items that are developed through several approaches, including the use of non-native English varieties. This interesting trend is the motivation for the current study, which explores how features of Malaysian English (ME) lexemes, are used as social media hashtags. To date, linguistic research on social media in the Malaysian context has focused on identifying the use of Malay and English slang words in general. There is relatively little research on the use of localised ME lexemes as hashtags in social media. The current study addresses this gap by employing a cross-sectional survey of the use and practice of a list of 30 ME lexemes by Malaysian speakers and a content analysis of the morpho-syntactic features of these lexemes as social media hashtags based on valid hashtag taxonomies from previous research. The study found that popular ME hashtags used in social media posts are mostly composed of short strings in the form of the # + two words and # + code-switching variation. Interestingly, the analysis of the morpho-syntactic features of one particular ME lexeme with distinct characteristics led to the development of a new category, namely "# + discourse particle".

Keywords and phrases: Malaysian English, nativised English lexemes, social media, hashtags, non-native English

Introduction

Social media is an umbrella term that includes internet-based sites and services which allow users to create or share content with other people in their network (Page et al. 2022). Today, these platforms have grown immensely in size and popularity and have created a new pseudo-language among their users through the application of acronyms, emojis, dialects, slangs and hashtags (Craig 2003; Barseghyan 2013; Jimma 2017). According to Fedushko and Kolos (2019), among these different methods and styles of online communication hashtags are found to have a higher means of attraction to content, with an average engagement rate of 12.6% higher than publications without hashtags. This is because hashtagging uses the pound or hash symbol "#" to draw attention to an action, image, subject, or reference to an event that often creates trends on social media (Iaia 2016).

According to Caleffi (2015), a hashtag can come in various forms and have numerous characteristics. Typically, a single hashtag includes one word, but it could also include more. Some hashtags include numerical digits but cannot be made entirely of numbers, nor can they start with a number. Special characters are also not allowed (e.g., &, *, $, %, ^, ~) except for the underscore symbol (_) to make sure that no white-space characters are visible as it is also unallowed. Hashtags can also be written in capital letters, or sometimes capitalised at each initial letter as they are not case-sensitive. Caleffi (2015, 68) also mentions that hashtags which include more than one word are "somehow enriching grammar words with a new dignity", as they can be tagged just like content words, thus not only becoming potential topic markers and community-building facilitators but also playing their part in the construction of meaning.

The practice of hashtagging began with the rise of Twitter in 2006 as a categorisation method for tweets that dealt with labelled topics and was later adopted by other social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp and YouTube (Rauschnabel, Sheldon and Herzfeldt 2019; Fedushko and Kolos 2019). In Malaysia, the practice is especially seen among the most active and popular social media platforms, which are Facebook (89% users) and Instagram (72% users) (Digital Influence Lab 2021). Several trending hashtags that have gained popularity among these social media sites in Malaysia as of the year 2021 include *#malaysiaku*, *#malaysiaboleh*, *#malaysiaprihatin*, *#negaraku*, *#malaysianfood*, *#instafood*, *#ootd*, *#sayajualmurah*, *#kitajagakita*, *#asalviral*, *#lawakviral*, *#staysafe*, *#stayathome*, *#covid19* and *#vaccinationdone* (Best-hashtags.com 2021).

The list of these trending hashtags in Malaysia clearly shows that the practice has developed into "a community building linguistic activity", as stated by Zappavigna (2011, 2). To date, studies on the linguistic characteristics, styles and variations of social media hashtags are available from Zappavigna (2011), Cunha et al. (2011), Potts et al. (2011), Caleffi (2015), Laucuka (2018), Fedushko and Kolos (2019), Mahfouz (2020), as well as Burikova and Ovchinnikova (2021). In the Malaysian context, literature that focuses on linguistic aspects in social media includes several from Namvar and Noraini (2014) who studied the use of English internet slangs among Malaysian youth, Zulfati Izazi and Tengku Sepora (2020) who explored the variations of slangs employed by Malay language users through tweets that contained the Malay language keyword *makan* (eat) and Marlyna and Tasha Erina (2019) who identified Instagram slangs, their characteristics and their usage.

As there is currently little research in the literature on social media hashtags from a linguistic perspective, especially in the Malaysian context, the present research tries to shed light on this particular phenomenon. Since past studies have mainly looked into the general use of Malay and English slang words among Malaysian social media users, this study aims to identify and explore the use and features of nativised English lexemes in Malaysian English (ME) as social media hashtags. According to Menon (2003), nativised English lexemes in ME are words that have lost their original colonial British meanings and have gained new non-native meanings. Studies in the area include several from Yen (1990), Menon (2003), Baskaran (2005), Noor Azli (2010), Azirah and Tan (2012), Thirusanku and Melor (2012) and Nur Fatima Wahida (2021).

Literature Review

Social media hashtags

Social media hashtags come in many forms and characteristics but are always preceded with a pound or hash symbol (#), which serves as a label for the message. Labels with the same characteristics are linked together in an online system, enabling social media users to share information and content and to retrieve contents that deal with similar, related topics of interest (Sagolla 2009). Wikström (2014), however, noticed that a traditional speech acts framework also applies in social media studies. He explained that besides labelling, hashtags can also be used for structuring, playing and providing meta-comments. From a linguistic perspective, Zappavigna (2011) describes the use of hashtags as a way for individuals to comment, praise, criticise ideas or people, promote brands or events and provide updates on breaking news items. In a more recent study, Zappavigna (2015) found

three more functions, including marking experiential topics, enacting interpersonal relationships and organising texts.

In par with Zappavigna (2015), Caleffi (2015) adds her notion by stating that besides serving as metadata, hashtags are often used as a way to show disclaimers, express accidental remarks or naming, express feelings and emotions, support events or movements, for self-mockery, for brand promotion and also for chat or conference participation. Laucuka (2018) established ten communicative functions of hashtags, including thematic branding, grouping, socialisation, justification, irony, database distribution, speech, campaign creation, advertisement and brand messaging, while Butt and Bhushan (2020) suggested theme marking, accumulation, socialising, justification, sarcasm, metadata, expression of perceptions and emotions, inaugurated movements, media manipulation and advertising of brands as their main mechanisms for the communicative functions of hashtags.

Studies that focus on the functions, benefits and motivation of using hashtags in social media have clearly been addressed. Yet, from a purely linguistic perspective, little attention has been paid to research, especially on hashtags of non-native English varieties. To date, studies on the linguistic characteristics, styles and variations of social media hashtags are available from Zappavigna (2011), Cunha et al. (2011), Potts et al. (2011), Caleffi (2015), Laucuka (2018), Fedushko and Kolos (2019), Mahfouz (2020), as well as Burikova and Ovchinnikova (2021). However, according to Caleffi (2015, 48), even in linguistic research, "hashtags has never been looked at nor investigated as the result of a morphological process leading towards the creation of linguistic items". As the aim of this research was to gain insights on the morpho-syntactic features of nativised English lexemes in ME as social media hashtags, the analysis of the study applied a combination of taxonomies based on the eight types of English hashtags and the 14 types of Italian hashtags proposed by Caleffi (2015).

In Caleffi's (2015) research, hashtags were observed as a new morphological process of word formation based on a corpus of English and Italian words collected through several online and offline sources. Her research explored the nature of these new linguistic items and their composition by considering the number of words in the hashtags and their position within the post, as well as the items that follow the "#" symbol, whether these include acronyms, combinations of digits and letters, symbols or words and phrases, the blending of words or phrases from multiple languages and many more. Scholars who have adopted Caleffi's (2015) model can be seen in more recent studies, such as Mahfouz (2020), who examined the characteristics of these hashtags in the Arabic language and Burikova and Ovchinnikova (2021) who studied features of hashtags extracted solely from

Instagram posts. The following tables present the taxonomies concerning the English and Italian hashtags, where they are categorised into a ranked system of several words or types, for example, # + one word etc.

Table 1. Caleffi's (2015) taxonomy of English hashtags

No.	Type of hashtag	Example
1.	# + acronym/abbreviation	#ootd
2.	# + one word	#marathon
3.	# + two words	#prettyplace
4.	# + three words	#ThingsNobodySays
5.	# + four words	#fromwhereistand
6.	# + five or more words	#IAmElyarsBillionthGirl
7.	# + letters and numbers	#b2bhour
8.	# +??	#duhDumduhDumDuhDumDuhDumDuhmdduhm

Table 2. Caleffi's (2015) taxonomy of Italian hashtags

No.	Type of hashtag	Example
1.	# + acronym/abbreviation	*#sbam*
2.	# + one word	*#cultura*
3.	# + two words	*#Tortesalate*
4.	# + three words	*#riderefabene*
5.	# + four words	*#NelTelefilmCheVorrei*
6.	# + five or more words	*#èstataunagiornatadura*
7.	# + letters and numbers	*#SS3*
8.	# +??	*#sboccinlikenotomorrow*
9.	# + blends	*#autunnestate*
10.	# + code-switching	*#milanobyebye*
11.	# + swearword	*#FerragostoDiMerda*
12.	# + dialectal expression	*#gnapossofa*
13.	# + idiomatic expression	*#gallinavecchiafabuonbrodo*

Nativised English lexemes in ME

According to Platt, Weber and Ho (1984), ME is defined as a continuum that ranges from the basilect to the highest acrolect variety. Although Singapore English and ME appear to be similar with few equal characteristics, both in reality have their own differences and unique identities (Deterding 2007; Lim, Pakir and

Wee 2010). Nair (1999) explains that although the variety is still very close to the parent language, which is bahasa Malaysia, it also has many new characteristics that make it distinct from other new Englishes as ME includes components of British English (BrE), American English (AmE), Malay, Chinese, Indian, Arab and other languages as well (Yamaguchi and Deterding 2016). By 1957, because the variety was largely and commonly used by the Malaysian speech community, ME reached the phase of nativisation and achieved sociolinguistic status and domains of usage in Malaysia (Thirusanku and Melor 2012).

In the literature of ME, studies have shown that the variety differentiates from other new Englishes through its linguistic features, including differences in its grammar, pronunciation and lexical usage (Thirusanku and Melor 2012; Azirah and Tan 2012; Pillai 2013; Nair 1999; Nur Fatima Wahida 2021). According to Thirusanku and Melor (2012), lexical features of ME are especially seen through the process of lexical borrowings where indigenous languages in the country are slowly being incorporated. For example, lexical borrowings such as *azan* (call to prayer), *jaga* (guard), *ang-pao* (red envelope) and *dhoti* (a long loincloth worn by many Hindu men in India) are all native words but are also recognised as English words in Malaysian Standard English (Hajar 2014). ME lexis is also found to have gone through processes of semantic shift where new meanings are creatively developed and expanded over time. The result of this process is the emergence of new adolescent in-group slangs and phrases such as *potong stim* (killjoy), *tapau* (take away [food]), *tackle* (to approach and flirt someone) and *pattern* (to act in an unusual behaviours) (Thirusanku and Melor 2012; Azirah and Tan 2012; Nur Fatima Wahida 2021).

Today, in this new technological era, social media users among the youth have continued to revolutionise more jargons and slangs such as the development of English words to new Malay words like *kipidup* (keep it up), *shuben* (husband) and *maleis* (Malays) as well as the evolution of English words adapting to Malaysian meanings such as "member", "on" and "cartoon" (Zaemah, Marlyna and Bahiyah 2012; Nur Fatima Wahida 2021). According to Nur Fatima Wahida (2021), in the study of ME, literature shows that there is a lack of focus, investigating specifically on nativised English lexemes as many new and improvised words have not been acknowledged. This is especially apparent in the Malaysian online setting as current research show a few from Zaemah, Marlyna and Bahiyah (2012) who examined the linguistic features of online discussion forums; Namvar and Noraini (2014) who examined the popularity and familiarity of internet slangs among Malaysian ESL students; Zulfati Izazi and Tengku Sepora (2020) who explored the variations of slangs employed by Malay language users; and Marlyna and Tasha Erina (2019)

who particularly identified Malaysian Instagram slangs, their characteristics and usage.

Since there is evidence that the ME mesolectal variety is especially prevalent in the online world, the study suggests further examinations of the use and features of ME lexemes through social media hashtags since they are found to have higher means of attraction and significant marginal effects compared to other typical ways of writing (Romero, Meeder and Kleinberg 2011). Based on a comprehensive study by Azirah and Tan (2012), the scholars proposed six sub-categories of English lexicalisation in ME including polysemic variation, semantic restriction, informalisation, formalisation, directional reversal and college colloquialism. However, according to Leech et al. (2009), internet slangs are mostly found and documented under the category of Informalisation, especially in social media settings. For these reasons, examinations on the use and linguistic features of social media hashtags were done based on a list of 30 popular nativised English lexemes in ME under the category of Informalisation as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Nativised English lexemes in ME

No.	Lexical items	ME meanings	Example sentences in the Malaysian context
1.	Spend	Giving a treat to someone	I <u>spend</u> you something nice today OK!
2.	Follow	To accompany	Don't worry, I <u>follow</u> you to see Mr. Lim.
3.	Line	An occupation/field	After SPM, what <u>line</u> you want to go for?
4.	Blur	Confused	You look so <u>blur</u> my friend, not enough sleep *ah*?
5.	Chop	To stamp	Ask Dr. Nizam, he can help *<u>chop</u>* your form.
6.	Best	Lucky or great	<u>Best</u> *lah* the new Avengers movie!
7.	Terror	Terrific or super	*Wah*, <u>terror</u> *lah* you speaking English!
8.	Power	Exceptional or great	Uish, <u>power</u> *lah* your voice! Just like Dato' Siti!
9.	Slumber	To feel relaxed or too laid back	<u>Slumber</u> *je* he came into the room and sat down.
10.	On	To agree on an activity	Our plan to Penang next week, how? <u>On</u> *tak*?
11.	Boss	Kopitiam waiter	<u>Boss</u>! One *teh tarik* please!
12.	Cable	Having connections with higher authorities	"Eh, how did you get the job? You *ada* <u>cable</u> eh?"
13.	Action	A person who is boastful, cocky and arrogant	Since you got promoted, now so <u>action</u> ya!

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Table 3 (*Continued*)

No.	Lexical items	ME meanings	Example sentences in the Malaysian context
14.	Roger	To phone someone	OK, *tak apa*, I will <u>roger</u> him later.
15.	Settle	To look after someone or something	Don't worry *lah*, I will <u>settle</u> for you, OK.
16.	Steady	Someone who is laid back or relaxed	<u>Steady</u> *lah* bro! You didn't look scared at all!
17.	One	Confirmation to a statement	You try ask my colleague, she sure know <u>one</u>.
18.	Stoned	To describe someone who looks lifeless	You look <u>stoned</u>! Study *ke* last night?
19.	Tackle	To approach and flirt with an individual	Now's your chance Daniel, go *lah* <u>tackle</u> her!
20.	Banana	A Chinese who does not know Chinese language	Tan doesn't speak Mandarin *lah*, he's a <u>banana</u>.
21.	Pattern	A person who acts in various unusual behaviours	*Haih* <u>pattern</u> *lah* you *ni*! Sekejap OK, *sekejap* not OK.
22.	Member	A close friend	Eh, <u>member</u> you from Sabah *tu* is also coming right?
23.	Slang	An accent	I love your Penang <u>slang</u> Maya!
24.	Control	Someone who tries to look good and appealing	<u>Control</u> macho *sangat lah* Raju *tu*! Please *lah*!
25.	Sound	To be reprimanded or scolded	Hurry up Farah! You *nak kena* <u>sound</u> again *ke*?
26.	Whack	To grab or dig in all the food	Don't <u>whack</u> everything on the table *la* Mad, eat slowly!
27.	Over	Doing things exceeding what is necessary	<u>Over</u> *la* you *ni*. We're just going to the *pasar malam lah*!
28.	Budget	To reckon or a person full of act and pretence	Jerry *tu* <u>budget</u> *je* like he's so rich.
29.	Onion	A person who likes to gossip	Same *lah*, my aunt also gang <u>onion</u>.
30.	Bang	To criticise	I *tau la* you don't like him, but don't <u>bang</u> *la*!

Sources: Menon (2003), Baskaran (2005), Noor Azli (2010), Hajar (2011), Azirah and Tan (2012), Thirusanku and Melor (2012), Lee and Hall (2019) and Nur Fatima Wahida (2021)

Research Methodology

To examine the use and features of ME lexemes as social media hashtags, the study first employed a non-interventional quantitative approach by conducting a cross-sectional survey among 100 random participants from various backgrounds in the Malaysian community. The main goal of the survey was to collect descriptive data on participants' practice of nativised English lexemes in ME as hashtags on social media platforms and examine their morpho-syntactic features. In the survey, after participants answered questions about their demographic information and some insights on their use and practice of nativised English lexemes in ME as social media hashtags, they were asked to write the different variations of hashtags that they often use or recognise on social media platforms from the list of 30 nativised English lexemes in ME provided in the questionnaire. Once the different features and variations of hashtags were collected and gathered, the study then went through a qualitative content analysis as described subsequently.

In order to validate whether the hashtags provided by the participants in the survey exist in the online world, the researcher first typed in each of the hashtags on Facebook and Instagram under the search bar to identify the number of posts that use similar hashtags. When hashtags are typed under these social media search bars, the total number of posts automatically appears on the screen, indicating the frequency of usage for a particular hashtag. Subsequently, these identified ME hashtags were examined through a close inspection of their features and variations, produced as linguistic items through new word formation mechanisms. To analyse these selected hashtags on the morpho-syntactic level, the researcher adopts Caleffi's (2015) taxonomy where it is made up of the # symbol + one, two, three, four and five or more words, as well as other variations that follow the # symbol such as acronyms, abbreviations, combinations of letters, numerical digits and phrases.

The reason for choosing Facebook and Instagram as the main source for the study's analysis is because both sites are especially seen among the most active and popular social media platforms, with respectively 89% and 72% of users throughout the Malaysian population (Digital Influence Lab 2021). In terms of data collection, questionnaires were distributed through the sharing of an online survey link based on a random sampling technique. The following table presents the overall demographic data of participants in this study.

Table 4. Demographic profile of participants

Demographics		%
Age	Below 10 years old	–
	11 to 20 years old	46
	21 to 30 years old	44
	31 to 40 years old	8
	41 to 50 years old	1
	Over 51 years old	1
Gender	Male	23
	Female	77
Active social media accounts	Instagram only	60
	Facebook only	5
	Instagram and Facebook	30
	Others	5
Total participants		100

As shown in Table 4, most of the participants fall within the prime age range of 11 to 20 years old (46%) and 21 to 30 years old (44%). In terms of gender, most of the participants were females (77%). When asked about which social media account participants were currently active in, 60 participants (60%) chose Instagram as their main and most active social media account while 30 participants (30%) stated that they were active in both Instagram and Facebook. The data clearly shows that compared to other social media platforms in the Malaysian setting, Instagram and Facebook are chosen amongst the most active and popular social media sites, as stated by the Digital Influence Lab (2021).

Results and Discussion

The use of ME lexemes as social media hashtags

This section investigates participants' dispositions towards the use of ME lexemes as social media hashtags and tackles the morphological structure and syntactic features of the selected ME hashtags as newly emerging linguistic items. The analysis encompasses the number of words in a hashtag as well as the types of characters used to form hashtags based on Caleffi's (2015) English and Italian hashtag taxonomies.

Table 5. Percentage on the use of ME lexemes as social media hashtags

No.	Lexical items	%	Means
1.	Spend	24	0.2
2.	Follow	25	0.3
3.	Line	19	0.2
4.	Blur	27	0.3
5.	Chop	11	0.1
6.	Best	34	0.3
7.	Terror	23	0.2
8.	Power	30	0.3
9.	Slumber	22	0.2
10.	On	40	0.4
11.	Boss	29	0.3
12.	Cable	22	0.2
13.	Action	24	0.2
14.	Roger	32	0.3
15.	Settle	27	0.3
16.	Steady	32	0.3
17.	One	17	0.2
18.	Stoned	7	0.1
19.	Tackle	18	0.2
20.	Banana	13	0.1
21.	Pattern	12	0.1
22.	Member	29	0.3
23.	Slang	19	0.2
24.	Control	19	0.2
25.	Sound	20	0.2
26.	Whack	5	0.1
27.	Over	16	0.2
28.	Budget	26	0.3
29.	Onion	24	0.2
30.	Bang	9	0.1

Findings from Table 5 revealed that from the list of 30 nativised English lexemes in ME, the words "on" and "best" were found to be some of the most popular ME lexemes that are used and produced as hashtags in social media with a total of 40% and 34% votes, respectively. Words such as "whack" showed less usage with a total of 5% votes as well as "stoned" with 7% votes and "bang" with 9% votes.

According to previous research studies, some localised words may be unpopular due to the lack of marketing and advertisement in the mass media, such as through television dramas, commercial breaks, radio stations, political speeches or banner words, news articles, magazines and local internet websites (Lowenberg 1991; Gill 2002; Nur Fatima Wahida 2021). In addition, Hajar (2006) explains that word choice made by speakers of the Malaysian context has proven to function more than just filling in linguistic gaps, but rather as a choice to express forms of cultural and individualistic identity.

Table 6. Morpho-syntactic features of ME lexemes as social media hashtags

No.	Lexical items	Morpho-syntactic features		Number of posts in Instagram	Number of posts in Facebook
1.	Follow	*#followbelakang*	# + two words/ # + code-switching	1,555	> 1,000
		#followsaya	# + two words/ # + code-switching	11,253	< 1,000
2.	Blur	*#blurblur*	# + two words/ # + reduplication	4,982	< 1,000
3.	Best	*#bestsangat*	# + two words/ # + code-switching	7,243	< 5,000
		#bestgiler	# + two words/ # + code-switching	22,314	19K
4.	Power	*#powergila*	# + two words/ # + code-switching	711	> 1,000
		#powerlah	# + one word/ # + discourse particle	1,034	< 1,000
5.	Slumber	*#slumberbadak*	# + two words/ # + code-switching	10	> 1,000
		#slumberrock	# + two words/ # + code-switching	13	> 1,000
6.	On	*#kasionz*	# + two words/ # + code-switching	2,121	< 1,000
		#onxon	# + three words/ # + code-switching/ # + abbreviation/ # + reduplication	365,958	180K
7.	Boss	*#bossku*	# + two words/ # + code-switching	417,501	2.1M
		#beresboss	# + two words/ # + code-switching	118	> 1,000

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Table 6 (*Continued*)

No.	Lexical items	Morpho-syntactic features		Number of posts in Instagram	Number of posts in Facebook
8.	Cable	#cablebesar	# + two words/ # + code-switching	132	> 1,000
9.	Action	#actionje	# + two words/ # + code-switching	177	> 1,000
10.	Roger	#paperoger	# + two words/ # + code-switching	18,996	35K
		#gerakdulupaperoger	# + four words/ # + code-switching	4,995	< 1,000
11.	Settle	#bendabolehsettle	# + three words/ # + code-switching	3,201	< 5,000
12.	Steady	#steadybrader	# + two words/ # + code-switching	369	> 1,000
13.	Tackle	#tackleawek	# + two words/ # + code-switching	49	> 1,000
14.	Member	#memberkamceng	# + two words/ # + code-switching	9	> 1,000
15.	Control	#controlayu	# + two words/ # + code-switching	634	> 1,000
16.	Over	#overgila	# + two words/ # + code-switching	24	> 1,000
		#oversangat	# + two words/ # + code-switching	766	> 1,000
17.	Budget	#budgetbagus	# + two words/ # + code-switching	17	> 1,000
		#budgetciput	# + two words/ # + code-switching	320	> 1,000
18.	Onion	#makcikonion	# + two words/ # + code-switching	174	> 1,000

Table 6 provides data on the variations and morpho-syntactic features of nativised English lexemes in ME that are produced as social media hashtags by the respondents of the study. Findings revealed that the number of words did not vary significantly, ranging from one to four words, with the majority of hashtags consisting of two words. According to Caleffi (2015), this phenomenon is not unusual as studies often show that shorter hashtags are more favourable. Regarding the style or type of characters, letters or numerical characters were not found in any of the hashtags given by the participants and only one hashtag was found to

include the use of both acronyms/abbreviations and reduplication (#*onxon*), while another hashtag only included reduplication (#*blurblur*). Interestingly, the hashtag #*powerlah* was found to be quite distinct and could not be categorised under any of Caleffi's English and Italian hashtag taxonomies (2015). This is because the particle *lah* is a salient feature of colloquial Malay as well as Malaysian and Singapore English and is not found in other regional or English varieties (Goddard 1994). According to Tay et al. (2016), *lah*, *meh* and *lor* are some of the prominent features of ME in the presence of discourse particles. To suit the Malaysian context, the researcher named and categorised this particular hashtag character as "# + discourse particle".

Data from the study also revealed that the most popular linguistic styles of forming hashtags in the Malaysian online setting are the # + two words and # + code-switching variations, with a total of 21 results. Hashtags which are formed in this morphological structure were also found to have some of the highest number of posts in social media, including hashtags such as #*bestgiler* with a total number of 22,314 posts in Instagram and 19K posts in Facebook, #*bossku* with a total number of 417,501 posts in Instagram and 2.1M posts in Facebook and #*paperoger* with a total number of 18,996 posts in Instagram and 35K posts in Facebook. As mentioned before, the total number of posts on Instagram and Facebook, which can appear under the search bar when typed in, also indicates the frequency of hashtags applied by social media users.

In addition, although the nature of code-switching is normally spontaneous, studies have reported that it is also a purposeful activity that can be used as a communicative device, such as to show membership and affiliation with others, to signal language preference, to attract attention, to contrast personalisation and to convey cultural-expressive messages (Adendorff 1996; Kamisah and Rafik-Galea 2009). This trend appears to be similar to the results from Caleffi's (2015) study under the Italian component as many of its hashtags also seem to be more productive and display a high degree of linguistic creativity through the practice of code-switching, especially with the inclusion of non-standard varieties.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study's main objective which was to identify and explore the use and features of nativised English lexemes in ME as social media hashtags confirmed that these hashtags do exist and are actively practiced among Malaysian users of Instagram and Facebook. In addition, participants' disposition on the use of these localised hashtags reflects the current trend in social media as the most frequently used ME lexemes such as "on", "best", "boss" and "roger" are also some of the hashtags

that have the highest number of posts in both Instagram and Facebook. In terms of the morpho-syntactic analysis, the study has revealed that in line with previous research, most ME hashtags are also composed of short strings and may include other characters such as abbreviations, reduplication and code-switching. However, characters like the underscore,capitalisation, letters, numbers, blends, swearwords, dialectal expressions and idiomatic expressions were not found to be some of the dominant features of ME hashtags.

Moreover, one particular morpho-syntactic analysis of the selected hashtags, which exhibited distinct characteristics from Caleffi's English and Italian hashtag taxonomies (2015), has led to the development of a new category. As the particle *lah* was found in this specific hashtag, the researcher has named and categorised this newly developed character as "# + discourse particle". This new finding highlights the fact that hashtags are continually growing to become the product of a new socio-morphological practice that can generate unlimited varieties of forms, thus generating new linguistic items as stated by Caleffi (2015). According to the scholar, the production of these linguistic items can be seen as somehow enriching grammar words with new dignity by offering innovative ways of meaning-making, such as the use of localised English lexemes as social media hashtags (Caleffi 2015).

As matters arising the growth of ME remain a debatable topic, the findings of the study provide evidence that new English varieties such as ME have indeed developed to become extremely significant as they are reflected through various extended functions, especially for the purpose of social practices (Thirusanku and Melor 2012). In order to investigate the vitality of ME as a whole, future studies should delve deeper into underexplored aspects of these newly emerging linguistic items as the limitations of this study include aspects of the types of lexical items, sampling population and methods, as well as data collection processes. Thus, further recommendations suggest that more research should be conducted to explore the use of other lexical features of ME as social media hashtags as well as the motivation behind its practice via online and offline communications, using larger samples to achieve a more comprehensive perspective of this fascinating phenomenon.

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