

---

**English Loans and Malayalam Borrowing**

---

**Antony C F**

Asst Professor Dept of English Govt. College, Ambalapuzha Alappuzha Dt Kerala 686561.  
Home address Chirayil House Manalady Ramankary P O Alappuzha 689595

---

**Article Received:** 14/05/2025**Article Accepted:** 03/06/2025**Published Online:** 05/06/2025**DOI:**10.47311/IJOES.2025.18.05.572

---

**Abstract**

The people in Kerala, whose native tongue is Malayalam, are known for their fondness for the English language. Every Panchayat in Kerala has an English Medium School. A fluent speaker of English is highly respected in Kerala. Unfortunately their number is very few. The love for English is explicit in the ordinary conversation of the people in Malayalam which is peppered with a number of English words. Malayalam is anglicised. Too many English words in the ordinary language may be one of the reasons for the failure in the acquisition of fluency in the English language. It adversely affects the Malayalam Language too. My attempt in this paper is to present how the English Language has affected Malayalam and to identify it as the reason that stands in the way of Keralites in acquiring fluency in the English Language.

**Keywords:** Loan Words, Code Switching, Semantic Shift**Introduction**

Malayalam is a very beautiful language. It is musical and very pleasant to the ear. Its melodiousness is due to its original words comprising of soft sounds which have their roots in the Dravidian language. But its musicality has been affected due to the onslaught of foreign languages, especially European languages and particularly English. Malayalam though borrowed words from other languages from ancient times, naturalized them amazingly. Tamil and Sanskrit contributed immensely. But, today, Malayalam is struggling to hold its leg before English especially in ordinary conversation. With the arrival of mobile and social media the use of English words have gone through the roof and there is no going back. Malayalam is being anglicised. What we experience today is the peculiar feature of “code switching” in Malayalam. Code switching is defined as “juxtaposition within the same speech, exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems.”(Gumperz 1982:59).

The present generation switches between English and Malayalam. They are every comfortable with such switching and are ignorant of even simple Malayalam words. The print media too use English words profusely in their write ups. Television, F M Radios, Movies, etc...switch codes between English and Malayalam. The rampant use of both English and Malayalam side by side ends up in using neither the language perfectly. The switching of code is the common speech style of the educated class. It is fashionable for some and dangerous for the language. Malayalam burdened with too many English words mar the beauty of the language and it looks artificial. Migration to foreign lands also prompts students prefer English over Malayalam. They think that Malayalam will dampen their future life in some foreign lands.

Another side of the story is that in many Schools and Colleges the students have been found struggling to write and speak English, despite the fact that they use innumerable English words in their conversations and writing and even after training in English in the schools and colleges for many years. The rampant code switching may be one of the reasons why Malayalees find it difficult to use the language fluently without errors.

Loan translations successfully carried out by languages like Tamil can be an eye-opener for the speakers of Malayalam to retain the uniqueness of the language and also to study English better.

My attempt in this study is to present some of the English words borrowed by Malayalam or made to borrow by the language and to identify some of the unique features of the borrowed or loan words and bring out the prevalence of English words in Malayalam.

To resort to Malayalam and look for meaningful loan translation at least in areas it is relevant, can make the language look natural and less and less artificial. The native Malayalam language should not be lost sight of. Its beauty should be brought back; the words like *kili*, *aruvi*, *nadu*, *amma*, *appa* are so heartening that no foreign language can bring us the joy of listening and uttering those words.

### **What is a Loan Word?**

Aristotle in his *Poetics* chapter XXI speaks of different kinds of words, namely, standard words, loan words, metaphorical words and fancy words. For him, loan words are “one in general use elsewhere.” (Aristotle, 1902 :77). Philip Durkin, the Deputy Chief Editor of Oxford English Dictionary, writes, “in linguistics, the term ‘borrowing’ describes a process in which one language replicates a linguistic feature from another language either wholly or partly.” (2014:1) The term “loan word” is treated as misnomer by him. He tells, “The metaphorical use of the word borrowing to describe this process has some well known flaws: nothing is taken away from what is termed as the donor language and there is no assumption that the borrowing or loan will be ever returned”. For him, “the idea of influence would be more appropriate” (2014:1). He stresses on the term influence instead of loan words.

Generally the linguists have identified three types of borrowing. They are loan words, loan shifts or semantic shift, and *claque* or loan translation

### **Loan Words**

“Loan Words are those words that are taken from another language without any phonological change.” (Sinha. 2011:172)

For Example, Some English words that are used in Malayalam without any change in pronunciation are : *road, car, college, mobile, computer, book etc....*

### **Loan Shifts / Semantic Shift**

Words of this class are compounds of foreign and native morphemes. A change in the meaning of an established native word to accommodate a new concept acquired from another language e.g; *ex wife..* (Nordquist)

### **Loan translation/ Calque.**

A form of borrowing from one language to another whereby the semantic components of a given term are literally translated into their equivalents in the borrowing language. ([www.thefreedictionary.com](http://www.thefreedictionary.com)). It means the words are translated into native language.

For Example; Aeroplane (*vimanam*) television (*dooradarshan*) train (*theevandi*)

A look at the above words can prove to us that loan translations were successfully carried out by past generation, which enriched the Malayalam language. Unfortunately the successful generation has been ignoring it through and through.

### **The Entry of Loan Word into another Language**

A number of reasons can be identified as the reason for the presence of foreign words in a language. The general and the most important reason could be the exposure to the foreign languages and cultures. Depending on the scale of exposure the number of the words increased or came down.

Loan word is not a modern phenomenon. It has actively played an important role in the development of any language. English is a rich language because of its greater exposure to foreign languages and cultures of Vikings, Germans, Normans, French, etc.... The Asian languages like Hindi, Malayalam, and Tamil also have contributed to the growth of English language.

Kerala had innumerable occasions to get exposed to foreign languages and cultures even before the arrival of European powers. Malayalam was enriched with the foreign languages like Syriac, Arabic because of trade relations with these cultures and the advent of new religions like Christianity and Islam. The migration of Jews also resulted in the adoption of new words in Malayalam from Jewish religion and culture

The large scale of borrowing of words was due to the colonization of the western powers like the Portuguese, and the English. Of these, Malayalam borrowed heavily from English. As the

topic is confined to only English, some of the reasons for the presence of loan words from English are identified and given below.

### **Religion**

Christian Religion though was present from the first century used only Syriac language for the church services. But with the coming of the British, the Christian theology, rubrics, the Bible used English and many words used were naturalized into Malayalam.

English words like:

Bible- *Baibil*, Christian – *Christiani*, Vicar-*vikaari*

Cemetery- *simitheri*, Satan-*sathan*, altar-*althara Cruz -Kurusu*

The names like:

Peter, Xavier, Antony became *Pathros*, *Sauriar*, *Anthony* respectively.

The loan translation from religious circles has been tremendously great. The very translation of the Bible created a number of words like :

“Pentateuch”-*panchagrandhi*, Exodus- *Purappadu*, Pslam-*sangeerthanam*

And scores of other religious words words like: Saint-*punnyavalan*, resurrection *ooyirppu*, sacred heart-*thiru hridayam*, Lord-*karthavu*, gospel-*suvisesham* Immaculate *amalolbhavam*, Ascension-*swrgaropanam*

### **Trade and Commerce**

The English words pertaining to business are found in Malayalam. The word “business” itself is preferred over its equivalent in Malayalam *vyaparam*. Some of the Loan words from business and trade are *stationery*, *sales man and sales girls*, *shop*, *shap*, and the innumerable stationery item like *soap*, *brush*, *book*, *rubber*, *bucket*, *basket*, *stapler*, *razor*, *lotion packet*, *bag* and several other words like them are used in Malayalam without any change, either in phonology or in meaning so also are the names of cockery, cutlery

Some of the loan translations in this arena are bottle –*kuppi*, hat-*thoppi*, book- *pusthakam*, motor-*yanthram*, vehicle-*vandi*

### **Education and Research**

Educational system has been instrumental in borrowing words related to education. Starting from the loan words like *class*, *board*, *chalk*, *bench*, *school*, *college*, *pen* –*pena*, book and the names of the degrees also used as it is in English. The words related to diseases and hospitals are also loan words eg., nurse, syringe, cancer, , scan, x ray and the names of the pieces of lab equipment employ English terms.

### **Science and technology**

Most of the scientific terms have no Malayalam equivalents. The English Loan Words are used for the Electronic items, Electrical items, Pieces of equipment of Information Technology, and most of the vehicles or means of conveyance.

Cinema related terms namely, *show, theatre, film, serial, matinee, projector* also use English loan without any change both phonologically and semantically

### **Colonial Administration**

The English colonizers had their own ways of administration and they used English terms for governance in Kerala. *Case, Police, jail, arrest, custody, file, clerk, collector, village officer, peon, appeal, seal,* are some of the English loan words are used in the same form without any change..

### **Various other Sources**

The English words are profusely used for the names of fruits like: orange, apple, rambutan, strawberry etc...

The names of vegetables like: cabbage, cauliflower, lettuce, onion spring, etc...

The names food items like puffs, cake, sandwiches, burger,

Dress items like: shirt, blouse, tie, pants, trousers, knickers

Names of the games like : foot ball, basket ball, badminton, cricket

They have found permanent place in Malayalam despite their foreign origin and the list is not exhaustive.

### **Cell Phones and Social Media**

They have created a world of English parlance in Malayalam. Mobile devices, apps, mobile actions and accessories are used in Malayalam without any change. namely, text, message, download , upload, headset, screen shot, delete, save....

Social media specific words too are used without any change, namely, post, share, viral, trending, influencer, like, comment, follow...etc

### **Elaborating on the English Words Used in Malayalam**

This section attempts look in detail about the unique features of English Loan words in Malayalam.

### **Certain Unique words**

***Apothecary*** : Ordinary people particularly the old generation used the term to refer to a doctor trained in English medicine. This word surprised me when I studied *Romeo and Juliet* where Romeo meets an apothecary a quack to buy poison to kill himself thinking that Juliet is no more.

***Ayah*** is from *aia* a Portuguese word meaning nurse. Ayahs were Indian house maids or nurses employed by British people. Ayah is an English word now.

***Connoisseur***. It means a person who knows a lot about something such as art, wine food etc... In ordinary speech older generation used this word sarcastically for a pedants. I have heard people commenting *Oru deputy konossar vannirikkunnu*.

**Suprend.** This is an English word formed by Malayalees. The term is the victim of phonetic feature of Malayalam and absence of the system of stress. *Suprend* is mistakenly formed from the English word ‘superin’tendent’ which could be pronounced only with stress.

**Injchiinchai.** The loan shift is from the English phrase inch by inch.

**Compounder.** Malayalam uses it *as kamponder*. Compounder is a person who mixes or combines ingredients in order to produce an animal feed or medicine.

**Poosai** This Malayalam word has its origin in English. It comes from the word ‘booze’ which means to drink alcohol in large quantities.

**Nicker.** this word is sourced from the word ‘knickers’. It is very interesting to find that malayalee nicker has only one leg. Another factor to be noted is that in English it is part of women’s dressing. In Malayalam it is worn by boys.

**Plier** in Malayalam has only one arm. Pliers in English have two arms.

**Trouser.** Trouser is used by old men as inner in Malayalam. Malayalam trouser also has only one leg. Trousers mean an outer garment covering the body from the waist to the ankles, with a separate part for each leg.

**Shap.** It is used for a place where toddy is available, and where the patrons sit down and drink . The word comes from ‘shop’ and the same word is used to mean places where various things are available for the customers. *Shap* might have been used to resonate the effect of the drink.

**Madama** comes from the word ‘madam’. Madam in English is used to address a lady. It can be any lady. But Madama is used to address a foreign white woman in Malayalam.

**Iskool, uskool** These words are formed from the English word ‘school’ used by people in different parts of Kerala to naturalize the word in Malayalam.

### **Words used with Confused Meaning**

‘Fit’ has got several meanings in English like: of a suitable quality, having requisite qualities and being in good health. But Malayalees use it to refer to booziness and being in good health. The Malayalam meaning is a strange phenomenon

‘Wit’ is mental sharpness and inventiveness, and keen intelligence. It also means a natural aptitude for using words and ideas in a quick and inventive way to create humour. Malayalam wit is less intelligent and is used for any kind of humour.

‘Tight’ has several meanings like close fitting, having tight schedule etc... but the meaning that has gained currency in Malayalam means lack of sufficient money.

‘Wire’ means metal drawn into the form of a thin flexible thread or rod. It is not insulated. An insulated wire is called cable. Wire is used in the sense of cable in Malayalam.

Certain English Loan Words with a peculiar reading in Malayalam

The following Words are naturalised English words in Malayalam. Their pronunciations are strange as far as English is concerned. Malayalam being a phonetic language reads the word

as it is written.

**Reading English in Malayalee way.**

Alarm -	<i>alaram,</i>	Film –	<i>filim</i>
Shirt -	<i>shart</i>	Vicar-	<i>vikaari</i>
Judge-	<i>Jedji</i>	vinegar-	<i>vinagri</i>
Christian	<i>Kristiani</i>	pick axe	<i>pikkas</i>
Satan	<i>saathanpen</i>		<i>pena</i>
Stapler	<i>staapler</i>	police	<i>polees</i>
Form	<i>faaram</i>	auditorium	<i>additorium</i>
Office	<i>affice</i>	cemetery	<i>simitheri</i>
Justice	<i>jestice</i>	cash	<i>cassu</i>

**English words used in combination with Malayalam words to form collocation**

**Line kambi** is a strange combination of the English word ‘line’ and Malayalam word *kambi* both mean the same.

**Cheetah Puli.** Cheetah the English word combines with Puli which has same meaning

**Jersey passu:** Jersey means a breed of light brown dairy cattle from Jersey. Passu and Jersey mean the same.

**Motor Thara:** A word current in Kuttanadu where motor is used to pump water from the paddy fields. *Thara* is the ground where the motor is fixed.

**A list of English Loan Words**

Ice	boat	pencil	brush
Soap	video	buttons	pocket
Shawl	phone	computer	calendar
Ball	bat	collar	shoes
Card	tape	bulb	glass
Conductor	jetty	tuition	class
Desk	nut	tester	pliers
Switch fan	gravel	stow	
Stand	motor	canal	hose
Cable	camera	mixture	socket
Plug	plastic	screen	torch
Slide	ribbon	paint	certificate
Cartoon	suitcases	safety pin	safety tank
Scale	inch	meter	battery
Powder	polish	cream	bolt

**Conclusion**

Malayalam has heavily borrowed from other languages especially English. Most of the words retain their original features. The naturalized words are fewer. It will steal the language of its beauty, identity and cultural heritage. It is a dangerous situation. Malayalam translations of English words should be encouraged.

The problem with the translation is that it fails to click. Translation should be done taking into consideration the linguistic features of Malayalam and an understanding of the loan word completely.

The present rampant ways of adopting words from other languages can result in making Malayalam clumsy and the foreign language words funny. It also hinders the mastery of English or a foreign language. The English speaking style of Malayalees are laughed at despite their mastery of the writing language.

Malayalam should have an effective mechanism of the association of experts and leading writers in Malayalam sitting together and evaluating and monitoring words that are borrowed into Malayalam.

Loan words should be subjected to scrutiny and loan translations should be encouraged like the past generations who transformed foreign words into typical Malayalam words like train (*theevandi*). The words translated should be simple, easy to remember and beautiful and musical to ears.

Malayalees should resist the tendency to malign Malayalam with unnecessary English words. English words have its own uniqueness that should be studied with respect due to English. This can pave way for mastery in that language.

People belonging to Tamil Nadu have an effective mechanism to naturalize the loan translation of the English words. It is by taking into consideration its unique identity.

The students should be taught to speak both the languages and be instructed not to mix the languages. Mixing will result in a group that fail to master any one of the languages. They should be encouraged to make use of Malayalam words in the place of English words.

Malayalees, once they venture out of their state stick to their Malayalam and fail to learn the language of the other state. This double standard proves to be a step backward in all respects. Respect to one's own language is the first step towards learning the language of another country, another culture and ensuring the growth of one's own.

**References:**

1. Gumperz, J. Discourse Strategies, Cambridge University Press, 1982
2. Aristotle, Poetics, Macmillan and Co, New York, 1902
3. Durkin, Philip, Borrowed Words, A History of Loanwords in English, Oxford University Press, 2014

4. Sinha, MP, Modern Linguistics, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 2011
  
5. Nordquist, Richard, Loan Shift  
<http://grammar.about.com/od/il/g/loanshiftterm.htm>
6. [www.thefreedictionary.com/loan+translation](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/loan+translation)