**Foreigner** and **Foreign** in English-language Newspapers in Malaysia: A Frame-semantic Approach

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the usage of two morphologically related words, foreign and foreigner, in two major daily English-language newspapers circulated widely in Malaysia. On the basis of 285 tokens, the study shows a striking tendency indicating that they do not share exactly the same semantic content. While foreign is used neutrally to modify things or people from a country other than Malaysia, foreigner is found frequently in four negative contexts (running illegal businesses, entering Malaysia illegally, bringing diseases to Malaysia, and misusing marriage in Malaysia). Using Fillmore's frame as a theoretical construct, the study seeks to explain why foreigner tends to correlate with negative connotations, while foreign does not. The central idea is that the **PERSON** attribute attached to foreigner invokes positive/neutral and negative values, and that the semantics of foreigner and foreign incorporates our schematic knowledge about everyday life. In conclusion, these results are stated to shed light on 'the changing tenor of English' in Malaysia.

**Keywords**: English-language newspapers in Malaysia; foreign; foreigner; frame; PERSON attribute

**INTRODUCTION**

The term **foreigner** is defined as “a person born in or coming from a country other than one’s own” (New Oxford Dictionary of English 1998, p. 718). In its second sense, it also means “a person not belonging to a particular place or group; a stranger or outsider”. The dictionary adds that a basic criterion for regarding someone as a foreigner is that the person speaks a certain language in a country where it is not spoken. By this logic, Americans who speak English are not foreigners in Britain. The adjectival form **foreign** (as in **foreign** **language**) carries wider senses; it is not restricted to a person, but modifies virtually any type of noun. The **New Oxford Dictionary of English** defines **foreign** as “of, from, in, or characteristic of a country or language other than one’s own” (p. 718). In its second sense, **foreign** is defined as “strange and unfamiliar”. In brief, the definitions of the two words resemble each other. The two extracts shown below, taken from the **Guardian**, a daily national newspaper in the UK, present **foreigner** in the heading and its adjectival form **foreign** in the body text. The first line is the headline. The key words are marked in bold for emphasis:

1. **'Foreigner'** helped build Terracotta Army  
   Chinese archaeologists have unearthed evidence that a **foreign** worker helped build the Terracotta Army mausoleum, the resting place of the country’s first emperor, who died more than 2,200 years ago.  
   (28 June 2006)