

DIGITAL SOCIOLINGUISTICS PERSPECTIVE OF KAWANS AMONG MALAYSIANS ON FACEBOOK

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Abstract. This study scrutinizes the pragmatic functions from the digital sociolinguistic perspectives of the pluralized form kawans, a hybrid formation mixing the Malay lexical item kawan ('friend') with the English plural suffix -s, in Facebook-mediated communication. Adopting a digital sociolinguistic perspective, the study analyses Facebook postings produced between 2020 and 2025, categorised into interpersonal postings and promotional discourse. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative frequency analysis of dominant language use (English, Malay, and mixed) with qualitative discourse-pragmatic analysis. Based on the findings, across both categories, a weighty dominance of English-dominant discourse was demonstrated with kawans appeared the most frequent in English-dominant and mixed-language contexts. Kawans functions principally as an indication of solidarity, playfulness, and peer identity in interpersonal postings with considerable linguistic flexibility and hybridization. While kawans strategically functions as an audience-design scheme to indicate inclusivity, approachability, and engagement simultaneously as preserving persuasive intent in promotional discourse. This study exhibits that the pluralization of kawan is pragmatically driven instead of grammatically necessary. This depth is based on Androutsopoulos notion of digital sociolinguistic stylisation, Bell audience design framework, as well as Bucholtz and Hall identity construction model. By demonstrating how code-mixing at morphological level could function as socially meaningful mechanism, kawans in this study denotes a stabilized language feature of Malaysian English digital discourse. The findings of this study contribute to visible perspectives on the role of digital platforms in forming contemporary language use and discussions on World Englishes especially in code-mixing framework.

Keywords: *code-mixing, morphological hybridization, media language discourse, digital sociolinguistics*

Introduction

Code-mixing attends not only as a communicative strategy but also as a site for structural negotiation between languages in digital and social media societies. Code-mixing, accordingly, refers to all cases where lexical items and grammatical features from two languages appear in one sentence. While code-mixing as the embedding of various linguistic units such as affixes, words, phrases, and clauses from two distinct grammatical systems within the same sentence and speech situation. The language interplay between Malay and English in Malaysian milieu discloses the grammatical incongruence patterns, namely noun pluralization, present continuous tense and past tense (Ahmad Bukhari et al., 2015). This study investigates one of the grammatical incongruence patterns, noun pluralization where English inflectional morphemes (plural -s) are inserted into Malay lexical item without modifying the semantic content. The English morpheme inserted into the Malay lexical item implies a syntactic adaptation that emphasizes on surface-level adjustments rather than deeper structural system. By investigating this phenomenon, the paper contributes to ongoing discussions on morphological adaptation (Anuar et al., 2020), bilingual grammar (Shahid et al., 2024), and the dynamics of contact-induced language change (Currie, 2025) in which intralexical mixing- word-level (Lolitasari, 2025) is frequently present on the digital

spoken platform. This is also, according to Yuldashev and Mamatova (2025), parts unique linguistic features of digital platforms. By situating the current analysis within these evolving discussions, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of morphological adaptation in bilingual digital discourse, and the influence of media on language use.

Malaysian English has customarily discerned as Manglish (AlAfnan et al., 2025; Yusof et al., 2023) in which the blending of Malay and English language has commonly emerged on digital discourse. Into the bargain, the productive presence of code-mixing in this context has reflected both linguistic fluidity and sociocultural negotiation. In the context of digital code-mixing, previous scholars have documented lexical borrowing in Malaysia (Alias and Mohd Basari, 2021), discourse particles- lah, meh (Hoogervorst, 2018; Tay et al., 2016) and syntactic alternation (Anuar et al., 2020; Baharum et al., 2019; Ahmad Bukhari et al., 2015) as primary indicators of Malaysian identity in social media settings. Notwithstanding the surge of interest in digital code-mixing, the occurrence of morphological hybridization (in this case, the insertion of English inflectional morpheme into Malay lexical item) has remained marginal in existing studies. The pluralized code-mixing form (kawan (Malay lexical) + -s (English plural)) illustrates a micro-level set of cross-linguistic structures. Although this form might occur constitutionally naive, it is sociolinguistically crucial as it indicates assimilation of across linguistic repertoires rather than merely language alternation. Most recent digital discourse studies on code mixing (Zeffrin Esme et al., 2025; Ismail and Abdullah, 2023; Kamil and Ritchi, 2023) focus on lexical or clause level, not explicitly on hybrid morphological code-mixing. Additionally, the questions of how the forms function pragmatically and socially in online discourse are still under-answered. Hence, this study examines the semantic patterns and pragmatic functions of the pluralized form kawans, a hybrid construction combining the Malay lexical item kawan ('friend') with the English plural suffix -s, as used in Facebook-mediated communication in Malaysia. Drawing on Calude (2025), this perspective provides a linguistically grounded framework for examining how communication is constructed and negotiated within social media environments.

Acknowledged by Malaysians, Malay language does not exert inflectional plural marking on nouns. Nonetheless, kawans was exercised repeatedly in digital discourse, especially Facebook. This study hence observes this as a cross-linguistic phenomenon and designates kawans as a pragmatically driven linguistic choice, formed by bilingual repertoires (English and Malay), platform affordances (Facebook), and interactional goals (interpersonal and promotional). To advance further understanding of this code-mixing phenomenon, this study investigates the exercise of kawans in Facebook postings from 2020 to 2025. The postings are categorized into interpersonal postings and promotional discourse. This present study examines how this morphological hybridisation form is dispersed across discourse types and how it functions pragmatically in context. This study incorporates quantitative frequency analysis and qualitative discourse-pragmatic interpretation integrating three interdependent theoretical perspectives which are: (1) Androutsopoulos (2014) digital sociolinguistic: serves a perspective for understanding kawans as a stylised and contextual resource in online interaction. (2) Bell (1984) audience design model: accounts for systematic variation between interpersonal and promotional discourse, highlighting how speakers orient to different audiences and communicative goals. (3) Bucholtz and Hall (2005)

sociocultural linguistic approach: to identity foreparts the role of kawans in constructing peer identity in online interaction.

Overall, understanding how social media, specifically Facebook, is behind this specific type of code-mixing is crucial for linguists, educators, and sociologists. It sheds light on how language evolves in digital spaces and how users navigate linguistic norms in a multicultural society, digitally. This study moves beyond what happens to how it happens online. This study aims to explore the code-mixing insertion of kawans patterns from digital sociolinguistic perspectives among Malaysian Facebook users, contributing to broader discussions on language context, identity construction, and digital communication. This study thus aims to: (1) examine the distribution of the pluralized form kawans across interpersonal and promotional Facebook discourse, (2) analyse the pragmatic functions performed by kawans in Facebook-mediated interaction; (3) investigate how the use of kawans contributes to audience orientation and identity construction within Malaysian English digital discourse.

Literature review

Malaysian Malay-English code-mixing on social media and digital platforms

Code-mixing in Malaysia is an inexorable portion of daily communication because of its multilingual setting. As Malay acts as the prime means of interaction across domains, for instance business, education, corporate, administration, and public discourse since it serves as the national and official language, English concurrently demonstrates a substantial role in in the same domains specifically in business, higher education and in digital communication, explicitly on social media platforms (Zeffrin Esme et al., 2025). This code-mixing steers Malaysians to exercise Manglish, instead of the Malaysian standard English. Manglish, according to Abu Bakar and Mohd Mazzalan (2018), is Malaysian Bazaar English, a daily interaction language that mostly formed by “Bahasa Rojak” (mixed language). This “Bahasa Rojak” is observed to spread digitally, be it on smartphone communication applications (e.g. WhatsApp, Telegram) or social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok). Grammatical competency might inhibit in the aftermath of exercising ‘Bahasa Rojak’ digitally as the frequent digital interaction occurs on social media does not comply with the conventional grammar of both language worlds. Surprisingly, these Malaysian digital ‘code-mixers’ placed less or even zero concern on the grammatical foul and treated this as a colloquial language. This establishes a solid notion that code-mixing is not simply structurally constructed but pragmatically structured.

Anuar et al. (2020) scrutinized the current media language culture of code-mixing insertion practice of English morpheme (-ing) into Malay lexical item (lepak) by Malaysians on Facebook. The finding acknowledged a new phenomenon of code-mixing insertion since the ‘chunk’ inserted was in the form of morpheme (-ing), not a complete word. The reasons for the use of ‘lepaking’ identified were a) Role identification: social, registral, educational, (b) Style identification: the language trend and (c) The yearning to clarify and interpret: the speaker's attitude and relationship with other persons and vice versa. In conclusion, ‘lepaking’ is an identification of language Fashion of ‘New Englishization’ and it emerges when co-relationship occurs between speaker, linguistic forms and language function. Into similar bargain, Lolitasari (2025) studied on morphological process of affixation in forming code-mixing patterns on Instagram quotes in 2023 to 2024. The study found several factors that cause speakers

to use the affixation process in forming code-mixing patterns, which are Intra-Lexical code-mixing, lack of grammar understanding, and technological developments. Collectively, these studies affirm that Malay-English code-switching is not merely lexical but deeply morphological, with inflectional morphemes serving as key sites of grammatical negotiation. The current study builds on this foundation by focusing specifically on pluralization incongruence, offering a micro-level analysis of how English inflectional suffixes are accommodated within Malay syntactic frames.

This present study narrows its core on code-mixing insertion on social media platforms, precisely Facebook. Studies on Malaysian English code-mixing on digital platform asserts that Malay language has been modernized towards Englishization (Anuar et al., 2020). This could be beheld by research on various code-mixing alterations on social media platforms (Adnan and Mohamad, 2024; Abd Latib et al., 2023; Mohd Nordin, 2023; McLellan, 2022; Anuar et al., 2020; Ahmad Bukhari et al., 2015). The research, nevertheless, mostly recorded more on lexical borrowing and discourse particles rather than morphological hybridisation code-mixing. A study on morphological hybridisation code-mixing of English-Malay language by Anuar et al. (2020) emphasized on communicative intent, suggesting innovation rather than random mixing, yet did not reflect on the pragmatic functions and social media role in contributing such ‘innovation’. With these numerous studies on code-mixing on social media in Malaysia, code-mixing insertion on morphological hybridization aspects are still underexplored (Anuar et al., 2020). This type of code-mixing insertion for this study involves Malay lexical item with the insertion of English pluralization -s, in specific lexical of kawans. This code-mixing pattern has constructed a form of “new Englishization of Malay language” (Anuar et al., 2020). There is yet moderate attendance to research in English-Malay code-mixing insertion patterns, notwithstanding the comprehensive literature on code-mixing insertion on online contexts, explicitly on morphological hybridization. This study hence explores the code-mixing insertion on morphological hybridization of kawans, unraveling the semantic patterns and pragmatic functions.

Into the bargain, the basic facts are that Malay pluralization is typically: Reduplication: kawan-kawan (friends); Numerals + classifiers: dua orang kawan (two friends); Quantifiers: semua kawan (all friends); Left unmarked when plurality is inferable: Kawan yang lain (other friends). The morphological hybridization (pluralization -s) has turned the conventional Malay pluralization: *kawan* → *kawans*. It can be observed that this is not unsystematic code-mixing, it’s a contact-induced morphological insertion. It’s not a mere word borrowing. English is not being borrowed lexically here: root = Malay (kawan); affix = English (-s). This is cross-linguistic affixation, which is a unique form of code-mixing insertion and theoretically drawing. English plural -s is not native to Malay morphology, yet it occurs in contact settings (e.g. digital discourse, youth, bilingual speech).

Pragmatics functions and identity construction in code-mixing digital interaction

Research in diverse digital contexts (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp) discloses that code-mixing is habitually exercised to negotiate meaning beyond the sentence level, where implicit motivational factors namely authority, transparency, and interpersonal engagement influence language choice. In recent years, scholarly has paid much attention to the pragmatic functions of code-mixing, especially corresponding to identity construction (e.g., Nurchurifiani et al., 2025; Zebua et al., 2025; Hendrikus et

al., 2024). Scores of recent research assert that code-mixing on social media functions to mark some in-group membership (Ibrahim et al., 2025; Nurchurifiani et al., 2025; Menggo et al., 2023) in which it profiles bilingual identity and interpersonal dynamics. Correspondingly, research on multilingual social media settings tabulate that code-mixing performs social and interpersonal purposes such as rapport building, personalization, and expressiveness, further highlighting its pragmatic implication (Zefferin Esme et al., 2025; Anuar et al., 2020; Yeo and Ting, 2017). These findings converge with sociocultural linguistic approaches to identity (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005), featuring that languages are stimulated not merely for meaning, but for work association and social positioning.

Additionally, some gaps still remain although several recent studies have stretched perspectives of pragmatic functions and identity implications of code-mixing on social media. Thus far, most studies hub on either inclusive bilingual identity construction without analytically relating pragmatic functions to identity construction across different types of digital discourse categories (in this case, interpersonal and promotional). They overlook how relational vs strategic communicative goal's structure language use. Furthermore, few studies incorporate interpretations of social meaning corresponding to audience orientation, yet how online users oversee pragmatic and identity work concurrently is still understudied. This gap is intensely prominent in studies that engage with audience design frameworks. This is to rationalize stylistic variation based on social goals which a theoretical need that the current study diametrically delivers.

Materials and Methods

Research design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach grounded in digital sociolinguistics, focusing on naturally occurring instances of code-mixing in online communication. The aim is to examine the insertion of English plural morphology (-s) into Malay nouns in Malaysian Facebook discourse, rather than to test predetermined hypotheses. This approach allows for close analysis of linguistic forms within their authentic social and digital contexts.

Data source

The dataset consists of Facebook postings produced between 2020 and 2025 that contain the lexical item kawans. Data was collected from publicly accessible Facebook postings. Only naturally occurring interactions were included; no elicited or experimental data were used. Posts were screened according to the following criteria: The presence of the pluralized form kawans; Clear contextual information allowing classification of discourse type; Sufficient linguistic content to determine dominant language. Data collection was conducted through non-participant observation of public Facebook pages and profiles. No interaction with users occurred during the data collection process. Relevant posts were identified by manually scanning the corpus for instances of plural marking involving the English suffix -s attached to Malay nouns. To maintain ethical standards, usernames, profile information, and any identifying details were removed or anonymized. Screenshots and raw data were stored securely and used solely for research purposes.

Muysken's typology of code-mixing

A typology of code-mixing that distinguishes between three structural patterns: insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization. This model is particularly useful for analysing multilingual data as it focuses on the grammatical relationship between languages within a single utterance, rather than treating code-mixing as a homogeneous phenomenon.

Insertion

Insertion involves the embedding of linguistic elements from one language into the grammatical structure of another. These elements may include lexical items, phrases, or bound morphemes. In insertional code-mixing, one language provides the dominant grammatical frame, while elements from another language are inserted into this structure. In the present study, kawans exemplify insertional code-mixing at the morphological level. The Malay noun of kawan function as the lexical base, while the English plural suffix -s is inserted to mark plurality. The surrounding syntactic environment remains Malay-dominant, indicating that English morphology is embedded within a Malay grammatical frame rather than triggering a shift to English syntax. Muysken's insertion category is therefore particularly suitable for this study, as it allows the plural -s to be analysed as a bound morpheme insertion, highlighting the micro-level grammatical interaction between Malay and English in digital discourse.

Dominant language

Each posting was encrypted for dominant language at the clause or post level using three categories (*Table 1*). This categorization designates the investigation of whether kawans occurs primarily within English-dominant, Malay-dominant, or mixed language settings.

Table 1. Categories of dominant language.

Category	Operational definition	Linguistic criteria
English-dominant	English functions as the matrix language in the clause or entire post.	English provides the main syntactic frame (word order, verb morphology, functional elements).
Malay-dominant	Malay functions as the matrix language in the clause or entire post.	Malay provides the main syntactic frame (word order, functional particles).
Mixed language	No single language clearly functions as the matrix language.	Balanced bilingual structure with alternating syntactic frames or parallel bilingual construction.

Discourse types

The dominant languages then were categorized according to the discourse types which include as in *Table 2*.

Table 2. Categorization of discourse types.

Discourse Type	Definition	Primary Communicative Orientation	Typical Linguistic Features	Interactional Focus
Interpersonal Postings	Postings principally oriented toward maintaining peer relationships, sharing experiences, expressing emotions, or engaging in informal interaction among friends.	Relational and affective	Informal tone; frequent code-mixing; emojis; slang; expressive markers (e.g., <i>lah</i> , <i>wei</i>); playful hybrid forms such as <i>kawans</i> .	Solidarity, identity construction, emotional expression, stance-taking
Promotional	Posts intended to promote	Strategic and persuasive	Mostly in English-	Audience

Discourse	events, products, services, or announcements, even when addressed to peers. These postings typically contain persuasive intent, calls to action, or informational framing.	dominant structures; calls-to-action; hashtags; structured postings; hybrid forms used for engagement (e.g., <i>kawans</i> as inclusive address).	engagement, persuasion, inclusivity, brand/persona alignment
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Pragmatic function

This encryption recognizes the pragmatic functions of kawans, including in *Table 3*.

Table 3. Pragmatic functions of kawans.

Prag. Func.	Operational Definition	Interactional Purpose
Solidarity and Peer Bonding	Use of <i>kawans</i> to signal attachment, shared experience, or affection among friends.	Reinforces group cohesion and relational intimacy.
Inclusivity and Collective Address	Use of <i>kawans</i> to address a group collectively, underlining shared participation or belonging.	Marks group membership and collective orientation.
Playfulness and Informality	Use of <i>kawans</i> within casual, or stylistically relaxed discourse. Often accompanied by emojis or slang.	Signals relaxed tone, linguistic creativity, and informal stance.
Audience Engagement	Use of <i>kawans</i> to attract attention, promote participation, or establish approachability in promotional content.	Enhances persuasiveness through peer alignment.
Identity Construction	Use of <i>kawans</i> as an index of bilingual, language fashion, digitally competent Malaysian identity.	Constructs and performs hybrid Malaysian English identity.

Note: Prag. Func. = Pragmatic Functions.

Theoretical framework

The analysis is anchored in three complementary theoretical perspectives. By integrating these three perspectives, the study moves beyond structural description of morphological code-mixing to examine how kawans acquires pragmatic functions through platform affordances, audience orientation, and identity negotiation in Facebook-mediated interaction (*Table 4*).

Table 4. Analytical framework underpinning the study.

Theoretical perspective	Key scholar	Core concept applied	Role in this study	Analytical focus on <i>kawans</i>
Digital Sociolinguistics	Androutsopoulos (2014)	Online language as stylised, context-sensitive, and shaped by platform affordances	Frames Facebook as a sociotechnical environment influencing linguistic choices	Interprets <i>kawans</i> as a language fashion, platform-sensitive hybrid form shaped by digital norms and affordances
Audience Design	Bell (1984)	Speakers adjust linguistic choices according to audience orientation	Explains variation between interpersonal and promotional discourse	Accounts for how <i>kawans</i> functions differently in relational (interpersonal) vs strategic (promotional) contexts
Identity Construction	Bucholtz and Hall (2005)	Identity as emergent, relational, and indexical in interaction	Provides framework for analysing social meaning and identity performance	Interprets <i>kawans</i> as an indexical marker constructing peer identity

Results and Discussion

Code-mixing typology: Insertion

Kawan + s: morphological insertion of English pluralization -s into Malay lexical item. In the diagram “a” signifies lexical items of the first language and “b” stands for the lexical item of the second language that has been inserted in the utterance by the speaker (*Figure 1*). According to him, insertion is well defined chunks of language B into a sentence that otherwise belongs to language A (Anuar et al., 2020). In his

analysis, insertion occurs when lexical items from one language are incorporated into another. The notion of insertion, according to Anuar et al. (2020), matches to what Myers-Scotton (2021) as “embedding”. Similar to this study, the insertion found is “well defined chunk” as the insertion involved was on a well-defined morpheme (-s) of English pluralization. The insertion of pluralization of -s in kawans appears as a morphological insertion, a borrowed grammatical system, indicating stable integration into Malay lexical item. Thus, this can be deemed as a language alteration of code-mixing insertion.

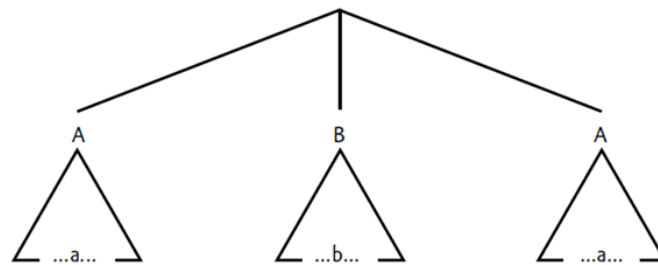


Figure 1. A graphic demonstration of insertion.

Morphological tension: Malay lexical, English plural

An analytically significant feature of these Malay-matrix lexical is the retention of the pluralized form kawans rather than the Malay plural construction kawan-kawan. This creates a morphological tension: Syntactically: governed by Malay (Kawan); Morphologically: influenced by English (suffix -s). This suggests that kawans has undergone lexical fossilization (Karimbayeva, 2025) as a plural form in digital discourse, especially Facebook. Kawans appears to function as a deposited lexical unit, even when English is the matrix language. *Table 5* illustrates the frequency distribution of dominant language use (English, Malay, and Mixed) in Facebook postings containing the pluralized form kawans, categorised into interpersonal postings and promotional discourse across a six-year period (2020–2025). Across the dataset, English appears as the dominant language in both interpersonal postings and promotional discourse (133), followed by mixed-language usage (47), while Malay-dominant postings occur with noticeably lower frequency (38). This pattern suggests that kawans is most frequently embedded within English-dominant clauses, reinforcing the argument that English pluralization (-s) on the Malay lexical item kawan aligns naturally with English syntactic environments in digital discourse. Moreover, this consistent insertion within English-dominant clauses signifies that the plural suffix -s is not erratically attached but morphologically integrated into an English matrix language structure. The hybrid form thus reflects grammatical convergence rather than simple lexical alternation. While the relative scarcity of Malay-dominant postings reinforces this interpretation. If kawans were merely Malay-dominant variation, one would expect stronger Malay insertion. Instead, its grammatical alignment with English environments suggests that morphological hybridisation operates within Malaysian English as a stabilised repertoire practice.

Table 5. Frequencies of kawans.

DL	2020		2021		2022		2023		2024		2025		T
	I	P	I	P	I	P	I	P	I	P	I	P	
English	7	11	26	22	7	4	25	6	10	6	7	2	133

Malay	5	2	5	0	1	0	2	1	15	1	6	0	38
Mixed	4	4	6	10	2	1	10	3	2	2	2	1	47

Note: DL=Dominant Language; I=Interpersonal posting; P=Promotional discourse; T=Total.

English-dominant interpersonal postings

English-dominant interpersonal postings show consistently high frequencies across all years, with notable peaks in 2021 (26) and 2023 (25). This indicates that peer-to-peer Facebook interaction among kawans compellingly prefers English as the matrix language, within which Malay lexical items *kawan* are English-morphologically adapted (*kawans*). From a pragmatic perspective, this supports the interpretation of *kawans* as a solidarity and identity marker operating within Malaysian English rather than within Malay grammatical norms. In this English-dominant interpersonal discourse on Facebook, *kawans* appears as a marked lexical insertion that indexes local solidarity and cultural identity within an otherwise English language frame. Its use reflects how Malaysian bilingual users strategically combine linguistic resources to maintain Malaysian identity while communicating in English. English may sometimes carry a slightly more formal or institutional tone in Malaysian contexts. The insertion of *kawans* helps reduce this perceived distance by introducing a familiar and intimate address ‘digital’ term. For example:

“*Dear kawans... where do I purchase these rocks ya?*”

“*Hi kawans! Who else on?*”

The lexical choice makes the message sound more personal and conversational compared to “friends,” reinforcing relational closeness although the users were unfamiliar acquaintances, digitally. English-dominant interpersonal posts on Facebook frequently contain localized lexical insertions that reflect the bilingual repertoires of Malaysian users. In this environment, *kawans* becomes part of a normalized digital vernacular rather than an unusual linguistic choice. Such usage demonstrates how multilingual speakers adapt language creatively in informal online interaction. In this case, *kawans* signals familiarity, cultural belonging, and informal camaraderie (Table 6).

Table 6. Examples of English-dominant interpersonal postings.

Example	Facebook user	Year
If you don't understand the above, invert Ur screen to it. Thank you <i>kawans</i> .”	Anonymous (personal)	2020
Dear <i>kawans</i> ... where do I purchase these rocks ya?	Anonymous (personal)	2020
Thanks for the birthday wishes, <i>kawans</i> !	Anonymous (personal)	2021
Thank you for these amazing three years my <i>kawans</i> ! Wish you all the best in your career.	Anonymous (personal)	2021
This is all for my <i>kawans</i> . You know who is you.	Anonymous (personal)	2021
Have a great festive holiday <i>kawans</i> !	Anonymous (personal)	2021
Happy Chinese New Year to all our <i>kawans</i> ! Have a prosperous year ahead everyone.	Anonymous (personal)	2021
Selamat Hari Raya to all my muslim <i>kawans</i> ! It's a tough Raya again (I feel you) and let us hope this will be the last distant celebration we have.	Anonymous (personal)	2021
We had jolly good times dear <i>kawans</i> !	Anonymous (personal)	2021
Wedding Ceremony! Reunion of form 6 <i>kawans</i> .	Anonymous (personal)	2021
Hi <i>kawans</i> ! Who else on?	Anonymous (personal)	2022
Happy birthday to my dear twin <i>kawans</i> !	Anonymous (personal)	2022
Throwback time ~ for all the BTS <i>kawans</i> ...	Anonymous (personal)	2023
My <i>kawans</i> . Memories for lifetime. Forever grateful	Anonymous (personal)	2023
4 ½ hours later going down memory lane with funny stories of our better halves, and <i>kawans</i> very surprising facts about people we know, kept us going.	Anonymous (personal)	2023

Hello family, relatives, <i>kawans</i> , just want to share with you my little achievement this year.	Anonymous (personal)	2024
Kawans! Thanks for the wonderful Christmas blessing.	Anonymous (personal)	2025
Two new kawans added to the gang!	Anonymous (personal)	2025

Malay-dominant interpersonal postings

Malay-dominant interpersonal postings occur far less frequently and show irregular distribution, with a notable spike only in 2024 (15). This suggests that while Malay remains an available resource, it is not the primary linguistic environment for the use of *kawans*. The rarity of Malay-dominant contexts further supports that the English plural suffix is pragmatically motivated rather than grammatically transferred from Malay. In Malay-dominant interpersonal discourse on Facebook, *kawans* is used primarily as a relational and affective marker that reinforces friendship, solidarity, and shared community identity within everyday interaction (Table 7).

Table 7. Examples of Malay-dominant interpersonal postings.

Example	Facebook user	Year
<i>Kawans</i> , ada yang tahu dimana ada cuci handbag di KK ni?(Friends, does anyone know where there is a handbag wash in KK?)	Anonymous (personal)	2020
Jemput-jemput. Selamat petang <i>kawans</i> .(Fritters. Good evening, friends!)	Anonymous (personal)	2021
Selamat hari raya haji <i>kawans</i> ibu.(Happy Eid, my friends!)	Anonymous (personal)	2022
<i>Kawans</i> ! Tahukah anda bahawa diri kita yg terdalam ini sangat membenci hal2 kotor(Friends! Did you know that our deepest selves hate dirty matters)	Anonymous (personal)	2024
Selamat Hari Deepavali, <i>kawans</i> !(Happy Deepavali, friends!)	Anonymous (personal)	2024
Membuat Keputusan memang susah ya <i>kawans</i> !(It's hard to make decision, friends!)	Anonymous (personal)	2024
Tahun depan jumpa lagi rxz <i>kawans</i> ride edition melaka(See you again next year rxz riding Melaka edition friends)	Anonymous (personal)	2024
Alhamdulillah selamat pergi & balik rxz <i>kawans</i> (Praise to Allah safe return journey rxz friends)	Anonymous (personal)	2024
Berhati2 <i>kawans</i> kalau ada yang otw balik kampung atau bekerja..semoga dipermudahkan(Stay safe, friends. Those who are getting back to their hometown or working. May everything be eased)	Anonymous (personal)	2025
Meraikan tarikh kelahiran <i>kawans</i> . Hb kamu berdua.(Celebrating friends' birthday. Happ birthday both of you)	Anonymous (personal)	2025

Here, *kawans* functions as a collective address term that signals group belonging and emotional closeness. Such lexical choices index social relationships rather than merely conveying literal meaning (Silverstein, 2003). Androutsopoulos (2014) highlights that digital discourse often reflects colloquial speech linguistic practices, where social contact is maintained by these informal expressions in online interaction. Though *kawans* is an informal spoken-written discourse, it is rarely used by Malaysians in everyday spoken interaction. This hence demonstrates that *kawans* creates a Malay-Malaysian digital identity or identity construction (Zeffrin Esme et al., 2025; Bucholtz and Hall, 2005). It can also be observed that Malay-dominant interpersonal posts frequently involve greetings, celebrations, invitations and shared memories. At this point, *kawans* alleviates in creating a sense of collective identity, where the speaker addresses a group of friends as part of a shared social circle. For instance: "Selamat hari raya haji *kawans* ibu." (Happy Eid, my (mother's) friends). The term frames the interaction as part of an ongoing community relationship rather than an isolated message. Additionally, through this process, *kawans* signals friendliness, familiarity, and shared participation within the online interaction.

Mixed-language interpersonal postings

Mixed-language interpersonal postings appear consistently across the years, particularly in 2021 (6) and 2023 (10). These findings reflect fluid bilingual practices,

where kawans functions as a hybrid form indexing bilingual competence, playfulness, and peer alignment. The occurrence of mixed-language contexts aligns strongly with a digital sociolinguistic interpretation of Malaysian English as a flexible repertoire rather than a bounded code. In such interactions, the alternation between English and Malay is not random but serves communicative and identity-related purposes. Kawans emerges as a natural component of this repertoire, enabling users to express authenticity and relational closeness while navigating multiple linguistic and cultural influences. Consequently, the term becomes an important resource for performing hybrid identities that are simultaneously local and global, traditional and modern. The use of kawans within posts that alternate between English and Malay allows speakers to address a broad audience while maintaining a sense of familiarity and social closeness. For example, expressions such as “Thank you kawans for all the support, memang appreciate sangat!” combine English and Malay elements to create an interactional style that is both accessible and culturally resonant. In this context, kawans functions as an inclusive address term that transcends language boundaries and reinforces group affiliation.

The findings indicate that in mixed-language interpersonal postings, kawans functions as a salient relational marker within bilingual and hybrid communicative practices. Unlike English-dominant or Malay-dominant postings, mixed-language interactions are characterized by the fluid integration of Malay and English resources, reflecting the multilingual realities of Malaysian Facebook users. Within this linguistic environment, kawans serves not merely as a lexical item denoting friendship but as a discursive resource for constructing solidarity, expressing shared identity, and maintaining interpersonal relationships across diverse social networks. According to Silverstein (2003), linguistic forms acquire social meaning through repeated social use. In mixed-language postings, kawans signals friendliness, informality, and membership in a shared Malaysian sociocultural community. The term therefore contributes to what may be termed kewan-ness: a recognizable stance of solidarity and peer alignment that persists regardless of shifts between English and Malay. Rather than functioning as a marker of one particular language, kawans operates as a stable index of social connectedness within multilingual interaction (*Table 8*).

Table 8. *Examples of mixed-language interpersonal postings.*

Example	Facebook user	Year
Nanti <i>kawans</i> .. I want green with white red (coffin) tau (Later friends...I want green with white red (coffin) yeah)	Anonymous (personal)	2020
Gudnite <i>kawans</i> semua (Good night all friends)	Anonymous (personal)	2021
Selamat Hari Raya to all my <i>kawans</i> ! Maaf Zahir batin and stay safe! (Happy Eid to all my friends! I seek forgiveness for all my wrongdoings, both physical and emotional and stay safe!)	Anonymous (personal)	2021
<i>Kawans</i> tau tak what pokok is this?	Anonymous (personal)	2021
This year takda budget. Kena DIY. Happy Blessed CNY to semua FB <i>kawans</i> . (This year no budget. Have to DIY. Happy Blessed CNY to all FB friends)	Anonymous (personal)	2022
Alhamdulillah photo2 terakhir dengan few <i>kawans</i> sebelum pulang from my lovely workplace. (Praise to Allah last few photos before going home from my lovely workplace)	Anonymous (personal)	2023
<i>Kawans</i> , minta opinion sikit. Let say I ada babysitter on call... (Friends, need your opinions. Let say I have an on-call babysitter...)	Anonymous (personal)	2023
I need my <i>kawans</i> to tolong translate boleh? (I need my friends to help me translate, can?)	Anonymous (personal)	2023
Selamat Hari Raya Aidilfitri semua saudara dan <i>kawans</i> ! We wanna welcome our member baru. Wishing you a great life despite choosing the path of this dunia. (Happy Eidulfitri all relatives and friends. We wanna welcome our new member. Wishing you a great life despite choosing the path of this world.)	Anonymous (personal)	2024

English-dominant promotional discourse

English dominance is even more distinct in promotional discourse, especially in 2020 (11) and 2021 (22) where the insertion is observed as structural and social. English-dominant promotional discourse constitutes the most frequent environment for the occurrence of kawans, particularly during the COVID-19 period (2020–2021), when businesses increasingly relied on Facebook to maintain customer engagement and visibility. The predominance of English reflects its continued association with professionalism, commercial credibility, and broader audience reach in Malaysian digital marketing. However, the insertion of kawans demonstrates that promotional communication is not solely concerned with conveying information or persuading consumers but also with establishing interpersonal connections. Although English provides the matrix language and structural framework, kawans introduces a locally meaningful and culturally resonant element that humanizes the promotional message. Despite sustaining local identity online, this exhibits influential function of English in promotional discourse, where transparency, reach, and perceived professionalism are still prioritised while the playfulness of kawans added a drama into the promotion. Although English provides the grammatical framework, the insertion of kawans performs significant sociopragmatic functions when its use is not structurally required yet it serves significant indexical function. In this context, kawans functions as a strategic audience-design feature, allowing promotional messages to maintain an English-dominant structure while incorporating a locally meaningful, peer-local-oriented term. This dominance carries a concept of ambient affiliation, where the language use builds interpersonal alignment in digital spaces (Zappavigna, 2012) yet sustaining the commercialized properties via English-dominant setting. Rather than addressing audiences through neutral terms such as customers, followers, or everyone, businesses employ kawans to position themselves within the same social sphere as their audience. This linguistic choice reduces the perceived distance between brands and consumers and reframes the relationship from seller–buyer to peer–peer interaction. Such positioning is particularly important in social media environments where users expect authentic, conversational, and relatable communication rather than conventional advertising. The use of kawans therefore enables businesses to adapt institutional discourse to Facebook’s interactional norms.

Beyond that, kawans in this English-dominant promotional context signals solidarity in which the form carries indexical meaning (Silverstein, 2003) where even within an English grammatical structure, kawans constructs ‘local affixing’. The English-dominant promotional discourse of kawans was practiced in ‘business manner’ by some official companies such Nando’s, BilaBila Mart, Young Living Ipoh, KTI Property and I Utama Shopping Centre to softening commercial tone of English. Those companies were observed to maintain the business standard while minimizing perceived social distance in which it positions the seller as a peer, not a salesperson where it diminishes power asymmetry via the minimum injection of kawans. This functions as stance-taking (Eckert, 2008) as kawans in English-dominant balances commercial authority with peer-oriented affiliation. Here, kawans sets off not merely as a plural noun but a marketable identity symbol where trust is built via linguistic proximity as linguistic repertoire is shared and cultural familiarity is acknowledged. Promotional messages are therefore transformed from purely transactional communications into socially embedded interactions that encourage emotional investment and community engagement.

Ultimately, kawans becomes not merely a pluralized lexical form but a marketable identity symbol through which brands negotiate trust, authenticity, and belonging in the digital marketplace (Table 9).

Table 9. Examples of English-dominant promotional discourse.

Example	Facebook user	Year
Dear all <i>kawans</i> , RC Planet will be closed for moving from 31/12/2020 (Thursday) until 4/1/2021 (Monday). See you soon!	RC Planet	2021
HELLO KAWANS! I wanna share with you guys my new shower routine with @kundalmy.official	Kundal Official	2021
Today, we're looking back on Lagu Deepavali DiPERi-PERi, a project we worked with Nando's in 2017 with our awesome <i>kawans</i> at Graph Studio.	Nando's	2021
We're here for our gym, <i>kawans</i> ! Are you ready? Let's get back on track!	Nando's	2021
Here's what some of our <i>kawans</i> have been up to over weekend. What bout you?	Drophetop	2021
Greetings, <i>kawans</i> ! We are excited to announce LE PIN is going physical with Thai IN Mookata Subang.	LE PIN	2021
Concluded our teatime makan for the Anjung Kelana <i>kawans</i> . Delighted to serve 50 packets of Fried Kuey Tiow with fried chicken.	Anjung Kelana	2021
Hi fb <i>kawans</i> . Thinking of doing a new logo for myself...which one you think is more ME?	Joanne Kam (comedian)	2021
To all ATD <i>kawans</i> ! Happy Holidays and Merry X'mas! Stay safe and healthy! Best Wishes!	Atelier Tee	2021
I am forever thankful for all of you my YL <i>kawans</i> !	Young Living Ipoh	2022
Hi <i>kawans</i> and strangers! My friends will be having a booth in Comic Fiesta this weekend!	Hand Drawn Studio	2023
Shalom <i>kawans</i> ! Here are the updated details for MJCC Leaders-In-Training (L.I.T) Program 2024!	Malacca Johore	2024
We're giving away 5 pairs of advance special passes to "Road to Vendetta"- in collaboration with our <i>kawans</i> at mm2 Malaysia!	Diocese Young People Network Hyatt Center City Centric Kuala Lumpur	2025

Malay-dominant promotional discourse

Malay-dominant promotional postings are hardly any, appearing only marginally in 2020 (2), 2023 (1), and 2024 (1) and is observed to be exercised by small entrepreneurs or businesses. This paucity suggests that Malay is less frequently used as the sole medium for promotion when kawans is present, possibly because the hybrid form itself presumes bilingual audiences. In Malay-dominant promotional posts, kawans functions as a solidarity-building device that frames commercial activity as communal interaction rather than transactional exchange. Its purpose suggests relational marketing strategies embedded within localized digital discourse. When Malay provides the morphosyntactic frame (following Carol Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame model) (Myers-Scotton, 2021), kawans is structurally unmarked. However, its pragmatic function is highly marked. Here, kawans constructs equality between seller and buyer, removes institutional distance and positions the promotion as peer sharing.

The use of kawans also contributes to the construction of what may be termed a communal marketplace. Instead of addressing audiences as anonymous consumers, sellers address them as members of a shared community. Expressions such as "Hai kawans si peminat Mickey" or "Cik Bunga cmana pulak kawans?" evoke the conversational style of everyday social interaction, making promotional content appear less commercial and more relational. Through this strategy, the act of selling becomes naturalized as a form of social sharing, where products and services are presented as benefits offered within a network of interpersonal relationships. According to Michele Zappavigna (2018), such forms contribute to ambient affiliation, where linguistic choices create diffuse yet meaningful social bonding. Although Malay-dominant promotional discourse occurs less frequently than English-dominant promotional discourse, its use reveals a distinctive communicative orientation centered on solidarity, familiarity, and community participation. The relatively small number of occurrences

suggests that businesses and content creators often prefer English or mixed-language promotional strategies when employing kawans. Nevertheless, when Malay serves as the matrix language, the communicative function of kawans becomes particularly salient. Rather than functioning as a stylistic insertion within another linguistic frame, kawans operates naturally within the Malay discourse structure while performing important interpersonal and persuasive functions. Thus, in Malay-dominant discourse, kawans serves as a powerful interpersonal resource that transforms promotional discourse into an expression of community-oriented engagement, where persuasion is achieved through solidarity, familiarity, and shared cultural identity rather than overt marketing techniques (*Table 10*).

Table 10. *Examples of Malay-dominant promotional discourse.*

Example	Facebook user	Year
Hai <i>kawans</i> si peminat mickey. (Hi friends, the Mickey lovers)	Anonymous (personal)	2020
Muka nak comey? Cik Bunga cmana pulak <i>kawans</i> ? (Want a cute face? How about your flower, friends?)	Anonymous (personal)	2020
Salam kawans Kedai baiki telefon AA Gadget Solution buka macam biasa hari ini. (Greeting friends AA Gadget Solution phone repair shop open as usual today)	Anonymous (personal)	2023
Hey, kawans! Mari bercerita tentang produk terhangat di pasaran, Aura Magika Bio Heat! (Hey, friends! Let's talk about the hot product in market, Aura Magika Bio Heat!)	Anonymous (personal)	2024

Mixed-language promotional discourse

Mixed-language promotional discourse displays moderate occurrence, climaxing in 2021 (10) and 2023 (3). This pattern indicates that code-mixing is strategically employed to balance persuasion and relatability, with kawans helping to soften promotional intent and align the users with peer-network Malaysian norms. In mixed-language promotional posts, kawans functions as a stabilizing relational foundation within flexible bilingual discourse. Its use reflects digital translanguaging practices and hybrid identity performance. In digital sociolinguistic, Androutsopoulos (2014) stresses how online users construct identity through stylistic hybridity. In mixed-language promotional discourse, the users perform bilingual competence, global-local identity and digital fluency. The insertion of kawans denotes grounded of Malaysian culture with a minor interpersonal degree yet inculcating global approachability. Consequently, kawans reconciles with linguistic hybridity rather than conflicting it. Mixed-language discourse, at present, signifies informality and digital nativeness. The presence of kawans escalates this by foregrounding peer-based digital interaction, allaying direct promotional intent and framing commerce as community participation. The promotional message becomes: relational + bilingual + informal, rather than institutional or corporate.

This can be observed that the mixed-language promotional posts were principally employed by major brands such BOH Tea and IPC Shopping Centre. These major brands use the term to frame commercial offers as community participation as part of brand alignment. In mixed-language posts, English and Malay syntactic elements alternate or mix without an obvious structural hierarchy. Within this flexible structure, kawans often serves as a consistent affiliative marker. Rather than being structurally marked (as in English-dominant posts), it becomes a discursive foundation that maintains solidarity across linguistic shifts, blending local Malaysian culture with global digital trends. In mixed-language promotional posts, the exercise of kawans align with contemporary understandings of translanguaging, where bilingual users draw from an integrated linguistic repertoire rather than switching between separate codes. From

this perspective, inference can be made that kawans is not merely an “insertion” but is part of a unified communicative repertoire where its use reinforces inclusivity, natural conversational tone and authenticity while maintaining commercial competence (*Table 11*).

Table 11. *Examples of mixed-language promotional discourse.*

Example	Facebook user	Year
Hello yang join .. share2 lagi with <i>kawans</i> (Hello to those who join.. share more with your friends)	Anonymous	2020
We may not be able to lepak at our local mamaks with our <i>kawans</i> . But at least we masih boleh lepak virtually with Malaysian’s favourite cup of The Tarik. (We may not be able to hang out at our local <i>mamaks</i> with our friends. But at least we can still hang out virtually with Malaysian’s favourite cup of The Tarik.)	BOH Tea	2021
Ilama tak jumpa, kawans! Jom lepak kat IPC Shopping Centre this November to enjoy special promotions and exciting reward! (Long time no see, friends! Let’s hang out at IPC Shopping Centre this November to enjoy special promotions and exciting reward!)	IPC Shopping Centre	2021
Hello kawans! We are now at Koi Kinrara Suites! Do drop by and say hi! Apa-apa pun ada, macam-macam pun boleh, bilabila pun buka! (Hello, friends! We are now at Koi Kinrara Suites! Do drop by and say hi! Anything is available, anything is possible, open anytime!)	BilaBila Mart	2021
Sedap dan unique! Apa say you kawans?	The Food Ranger	2021
Happy Sunyay kawans! We got our Beli Telur Saya (BTS) promo juga! Everytime you spend kawans boleh SAVE! Hoooo!	Farm Stories	2021
Price reduction kawans RM650 to RM450. Siapa cepat dia dapat!	EDC Malaysia	2023

Pragmatic function of Kawans

The findings reveal that kawans performs multiple pragmatic functions across both interpersonal postings and promotional discourse on Facebook, although the relative importance of these functions varies according to interactional purpose. In both contexts, kawans serves as an inclusive address form that indexes solidarity and shared group membership. However, while interpersonal postings employ kawans primarily to construct and maintain social relationships, promotional discourse strategically deploys the term to engage audiences, reduce social distance, and soften persuasive intent. This demonstrates the flexibility of kawans as a pragmatic resource that adapts to different discourse goals while retaining its core association with friendship and affiliation. This suggests a redistribution of pragmatic weight: Interpersonal discourse → Identity-driven use. Promotional discourse → Audience-designed use. Across the six-year period, the presence of kawans remains consistent, with fluctuations but no disappearance. This longitudinal persistence suggests that the form is not a fleeting trend but part of an emerging conventionalised pattern in Malaysian English digital interaction. The continued embedding of kawans in English-dominant environments supports the argument that it may represent: A stabilised morphological hybrid. A stylised Malaysian English feature. A digital index of “kawan-ness” or “localized buddy”.

Interpersonal postings

Interpersonal postings show higher variability across language types, strong peaks in English-dominant and mixed contexts and rich pragmatic multifunctionality. In these interpersonal postings, kawans functions predominantly as a marker of solidarity and peer bonding. The pluralized form indexes friendship, familiarity, and shared group identity, enabling speakers to position themselves as members of a common social network rather than isolated individuals. The examples provided illustrate that kawans performs solidarity, playfulness, mitigation, inclusivity, and identity construction: “Happy Deepavali, kawans!” → Solidarity & peer bonding. “Selamat Hari Raya Haji

kawans ibu” → Identity construction. Through repeated use in greetings, congratulations, and everyday interactions, kawans becomes a relational indexical that reinforces emotional connections among Facebook users.

Another important pragmatic function is playfulness and informality. The hybrid morphology of kawans, combining the Malay noun kawan with the English plural suffix -s, reflects a relaxed and creative communication style characteristic of Malaysian digital discourse. Rather than following conventional grammatical norms, users employ kawans as a stylized expression that signals informality and approachability. The hybrid plural does not appear accidental; rather, it stylizes informality and local authenticity within an English-led digital environment. This playful quality contributes to the conversational tone of interpersonal interactions and strengthens rapport among participants. At the same time, the form indexes bilingual identity by demonstrating familiarity with both Malay and English linguistic resources. Consequently, kawans functions as a marker of local authenticity and participation in Malaysian online culture. The term also performs an inclusive function by constructing a collective audience. Unlike singular forms of address, kawans allows Facebook users to simultaneously address multiple individuals while maintaining a personal and friendly tone, digitally. This inclusivity is particularly useful in Facebook environments where audiences often comprise diverse networks of friends, relatives, colleagues, and acquaintances. By using kawans, speakers invite broad participation without sacrificing interpersonal warmth. Thus, interpersonal postings reveal a largely identity-driven use of kawans, where relational meanings take precedence over strategic communicative objectives.

Promotional discourse

Promotional discourse demonstrates stronger English dominance, greater structural consistency and more strategic deployment of hybrid address. In this promotional discourse, kawans retains its affiliative meaning but is positioned more strategically to achieve communicative and commercial objectives. One of its primary functions is audience engagement. By directly addressing audiences as kawans, promoters create a conversational and approachable tone that encourages interaction. Rather than communicating from a position of institutional authority, businesses, sellers and content creators position themselves as peers within the same social community. This strategy aligns promotional communication with Facebook’s interactional norms, where relational engagement often enhances audience participation. The second function is inclusivity and group appeal. Expressions used by these Facebook users construct audiences as members of a shared community rather than as anonymous consumers. This collective framing broadens the appeal of promotional messages and encourages participation by emphasizing belonging rather than transaction. Consequently, kawans assists transform commercial communication into a more socially embedded activity. In this orientation, kawans shifts functionally. While it still indexes solidarity, it becomes strategically calibrated to simulate intimacy and soften persuasive intent principally in business settings. The hybrid form enables promoters to maintain an English-dominant professional tone while invoking localised peer alignment, digitally.

Into the same bargain, promotional discourse also employs kawans to soften persuasive intent. Through playfulness and informality, the term reduces the authoritative or coercive tone often associated with advertising. For instance, statements such as “Greetings, kawans! We are excited to announce LE PIN...” present promotional offers as friendly recommendations rather than direct sales pitches. This

mitigation strategy enables businesses to maintain a persuasive agenda while preserving positive interpersonal relations with their audiences. The use of kawans therefore serves as a form of relational marketing that prioritizes trust and engagement over overt commercial pressure. Furthermore, kawans contributes to identity construction in promotional contexts by positioning promoters as members of the same social group as their audiences. Rather than appearing as external advertisers, businesses adopt the linguistic style of everyday users to project authenticity and relatability. This peer-oriented positioning supports the development of a friendly brand persona and encourages audience identification with the promoter. In this sense, kawans functions as a discursive tool through which brands perform local identity and community membership while pursuing commercial goals.

Comparative interpretation

The findings suggest a redistribution of pragmatic functions across discourse types. In interpersonal postings, kawans is primarily identity-driven, emphasizing solidarity, friendship, and shared belonging. In promotional discourse, the same form becomes audience-designed, strategically mobilized to attract attention, encourage participation, and mitigate persuasive intent. Despite these differences, both discourse types rely on the core semantic and social meanings of kawans as a marker of affiliation. Its continued use across the six-year period indicates that kawans has become a conventionalized feature of Malaysian digital discourse, functioning simultaneously as a stabilised morphological hybrid, a stylistic marker of Malaysian English online interaction, and a linguistic manifestation of kavan-ness (localized ‘buddy’) the performance of solidarity, inclusivity, and communal belonging in social media communication.

Integrating digital stylisation, audience design, and identity construction

The distributional and pragmatic analysis of kawans can be most coherently understood through the integration of three complementary sociolinguistic perspectives: Digital Sociolinguistics, Audience Design, and Identity Construction. Together, these frameworks allow the study to move beyond structural description toward an explanation of how morphological hybridisation acquires social meaning in Facebook-mediated interaction. From a Digital Sociolinguistic perspective (Androutsopoulos, 2014), Facebook functions as a sociotechnical environment that shapes linguistic practice through visibility, interactivity, and context collapse. The predominance of kawans in English-dominant and mixed-language environments across the six-year dataset reflects not random alternation, but stylised hybridisation within a platform-sensitive register. The pluralised form of Malay lexical aligns naturally with English matrix clauses while retaining local semantic resonance. Its persistence over time suggests that kawans operates as a stylised digital resource: informal, locally marked, and recognisable within Malaysian English online norms. The peaks in interpersonal English-dominant postings (e.g., 2021, 2023) further reinforce that this hybrid form participates in platform-typical peer interaction styles characterised by informality and expressive hybridity.

Bell (1984) Audience Design framework provides a complementary explanation for the variation observed between relational and strategic discourse. The data demonstrate that while English dominance remains strong across both orientations, the pragmatic

deployment of kawans shifts according to communicative goals. In interpersonal postings, kawans functions primarily as solidarity-building and affiliative address. In promotional discourse, however, it becomes strategically calibrated to soften persuasion, create pseudo-intimacy, and enhance audience engagement. The higher structural consistency and English dominance in promotional contexts suggest deliberate stylistic calibration toward imagined publics. Thus, the hybrid form is not merely expressive but audience-sensitive, demonstrating stylistic flexibility in response to relational versus persuasive orientations. Finally, the sociocultural linguistic model of Identity Construction (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005) enables interpretation of kawans as an indexical marker. Across both orientations, the form contributes to the construction of “kawan-ness,” (localized “buddy”) but in distinct configurations. In relational discourse, identity emerges through peer bonding, playfulness, mitigation, and shared bilingual alignment. The hybrid plural indexes belonging, familiarity, and informal collective identity. In strategic discourse, identity shifts toward entrepreneurial positioning. Here, kawans constructs an approachable brand persona while simultaneously invoking collective inclusion. Identity is therefore not static but relationally negotiated and context-dependent. Crucially, integrating these three frameworks reveals that the social meaning of kawans is layered: As stylisation, it reflects platform-shaped hybridity. As audience design, it varies according to communicative orientation. As identity construction, it indexes relational belonging and entrepreneurial positioning.

The quantitative dominance of English-dominant environments establishes the grammatical insertion of kawans within Malaysian English digital practice, while the qualitative analysis demonstrates how this morphological hybrid becomes socially meaningful. Rather than functioning as incidental code-mixing, kawans emerges as a stabilised, audience-sensitive, and identity-indexing feature of Malaysian English in digitally mediated discourse. Rather than constituting incidental code-mixing, kawans emerges as a stabilised, multifunctional, and identity-bearing feature of Malaysian English within Facebook discourse. Its significance lies not merely in its hybrid morphology, but in its capacity to mediate relational alignment, persuasive positioning, and indexical identity within a digitally networked sociolinguistic landscape.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings suggest that kawans has undergone lexical fossilization as a plural form in digital discourse, particularly on Facebook. Rather than being generated anew through English grammar in each instance, kawans appears to function as a stored lexical unit. The analysis contributes to ongoing debates about Malaysian English by demonstrating that features often dismissed as “non-standard” are in fact systematic, meaningful, and socially embedded. The form kawans illustrates how Malaysian English operates as a dynamic repertoire, shaped by multilingual competence and digital communication practices. Rather than viewing such forms as deviation from either Malay or Standard English, this study positions kawans as a legitimate feature of Malaysian English in digital contexts, reflecting local identity negotiation within global platforms. Ultimately, the analysis of kawans underscores a key insight: digital platforms are not merely sites of language use but sites of linguistic development. Through repeated, audience-sensitive, and identity-laden deployment, hybrid forms such as kawans become stabilised features of contemporary Malaysian English,

reflecting the fluid, creative, and socially embedded nature of language in the digital age.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involved with any parties in this research study.

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