

The Evolution of ‘kita-kita’: A Diachronic Discourse Analysis of Pronominal Reduplication in Standard Malay

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Abstract

This study investigates the sociolinguistic trajectory of the reduplicated pronoun ‘kita-kita’ in Malay language. While traditional prescriptive grammar often considers ‘kita-kita’ as a redundancy or error, its persistent usage in informal social contexts suggest a specialized pragmatic function. By adopting a diachronic discourse perspective, this research reconciles the apparent contradiction between the decline of ‘kita-kita’ following the national standardization post-independence and its contemporary resurgence in digital and vernacular registers. Drawing on a selected corpus of historical texts and modern social media interactions, the analysis reveals that ‘kita-kita’ has transitioned from a standard plural marker to a micro-level social tool used to negotiate “in-group” identity and exclusivity. The findings suggest that the survival is intrinsically linked to the multifunctional

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nature of Malay reduplication, facilitates language sustainability through its adaptability to changing socio-political landscapes. This study contributes to the broader understanding of how non-standard morphological forms persist as markers of social meaning despite formal linguistic pressures.

Keywords: Corpus-based Analysis, Pronoun, Reduplication, Socio-political Perspective, Standard Malay

1. Introduction

The reduplicated pronoun *kita-kita* is a common feature of everyday Malaysian conversation and is also frequently encountered in informal text messages on social media platforms. In Standard Malay (Bahasa Melayu), the reduplicated pronoun 'kita-kita' is employed with the specific intention of achieving a particular communication objective. The following short conversation is often heard.

Subject A: Jom, minum kopi.

("Come, let's go and have some coffee.")

Subject B: Ok, kita-kita aje?

("Ok, only the two of us?")

Subject A: Siapa lagi kalau bukan kita?

("If not us, who else?")

In the extract above, Subject A extends an invitation to Subject B to engage in a social interaction over coffee. B accepts the invitation and requests confirmation from A, inquiring as to whether the presence of other participants or the potential arrival of a guest is anticipated. To elucidate further, A reiterates with B that the two of them are the only participants. In this context, the term 'kita-kita' or 'two of us' is used to indicate that the participation involved the speaker and the listener solely and exclusively, without considering any further intention or motive of the parties involved. This exclusivity precludes the possibility of a third party and serves to reinforce the bond between the speaker and the listener. The use of 'kita-kita' in the interaction between two

individuals is a particularly intriguing phenomenon. It would appear that the use of 'kita-kita' serves a social function, facilitating the formation of social bonds. In light of this curiosity, our objective is to gain a deeper understanding of how interlocutors utilise it to achieve communication objectives.

In the morphological structure, the word 'kita-kita' is a reduplication derived from 'kita', which is a plural pronoun analogous to 'we' in English as a subject or as an object, 'us' in English. Given that the word 'kita' has already indicated pluralisation and denotes a collective of individuals with two or more than two members, it is therefore somewhat perplexing that the word 'kita' can be reduplicated to become 'kita-kita'. It is evident that this form of reduplication is regarded as an error and should not be tolerated in logical discourse. Nevertheless, it persists in everyday communication. In the context of Malaysian conventional education and common sense, the use of the personal pronoun 'kita-kita' in conversation is perceived as a grammatical error in Standard Malay. This is because the personal pronouns in standard Malay such as 'saya' (formal 'I' or me), 'aku' (informal 'I' or me), 'engkau' (informal 'you'), 'anda' (formal 'you'), 'dia' (he or him, she or her), 'kami' (we or us, not including the listener), 'kita' (we or us, including the listener), 'kamu' (all of you or formal 'you' in certain contexts) and 'mereka' (they or them) are strictly prohibited from being 'reduplicated'. It can therefore be concluded that this is merely an instance of a slip of the tongue. Nevertheless, this may not be the case. This may be attributed to the fact that the social function of 'kita' is no longer capable of fulfilling the requirements of social interaction. Thus, the Malay expression "kita-kita aje" which translates to "just us" is typically encountered and accepted.

The pronoun 'we' used as a subject and 'us' used as an object in the syntax represents a highly effective linguistic tool for social mobilisation in Malayic languages. In Standard Malay, which is the dominant form of the language in Malaysia, numerous political slogans employ the use of 'kita' as a propagandistic device. In contemporary Malay discourse, the pronoun 'kita' has been employed to instil a sense of collective identity and inclusivity. In addition to its role in social mobilization, the pronoun 'kita' serves to distinguish between allies and adversaries within the Malay community. If you heard "dia ni, orang kita," which translates to "he/she is one of us," you would understand that the speaker is identifying the individual as a member of their social group. This example illustrates how the pronoun 'kita' is employed to delineate a social boundary and to foster solidarity among social members. The phrase "kita semua" (literally "we all") is used to

indicate that the speaker is referring to all members of a particular community, thereby excluding those who are not part of that community.

The pronoun reduplication in 'kita' is a notable exception to the general rule that personal pronouns are expected to have a relatively stable and consistent grammatical function. In the field of linguistics, the term 'personal pronoun' is used to describe a specific lexical item that has a clearly defined and fixed grammatical function. This function is to distinguish each person in a conversational exchange or in a text, and it is used to express deixis, number, gender, animacy, or any other distinctions (Gardelle & Sorlin, 2015). It is hypothesised to be a stagnant and inactive element, exhibiting resistance to change (Krauthamer, 2021). Personal pronouns such as 'kita' have been categorised in a closed set, and it is believed to be unlikely that they will undergo any significant changes in terms of semantics. However, as language is a complex and evolving system, even relatively stable and static pronouns may undergo some form of change over time. The speakers and listeners themselves tend to reorganise and reconstruct the language they use in order to meet their needs of expression and the purpose of communication. It can therefore be surmised that as individuality becomes increasingly prevalent and the liberation of identity is promoted in contemporary society, the usage of pronouns may undergo significant changes.

If the reduplication is attested in 'kita-kita', what evidence is there that it occurs in 'kami'? The question thus arises as to whether the plural form 'kami-kami' exists. The two plural pronouns, 'kita' and 'kami', both signify 'we' as the subject and 'us' as the object in English. However, there is a notable distinction in their respective usage. In Malay grammar, personal pronouns are employed as a substitute for the antecedent, which is a noun that can be inferred from the context (Liaw & Abdullah Hassan, 1994). In the construction 'kita', the speaker, the listener and the third person are all included, whereas in 'kami', the listener is not. The following examples may serve to elucidate the distinction between the pronouns "kita" and "kami".

(1) Kami berkawan baik sejak kecil.
Pronoun We make friends good since small
(We become friends since childhood.)

(2) Kita akan berkawan selamanya.
Pronoun We will make friends forever
(We will be friends forever.)

In Example (1), the personal pronoun ‘kami’ indicates ‘saya dan dia’ in Standard Malay, that is to say, the third person and I. Consequently, the speaker did not include the listener, who was involved in the conversation, and the speaker spoke about himself or herself and the other person in front of the listener. In Example (2), the use of ‘kita’ indicates that the speaker has included all listeners and all members involved. The distinction between the pronouns ‘kita’ and ‘kami’ can be illustrated in Figure 1.

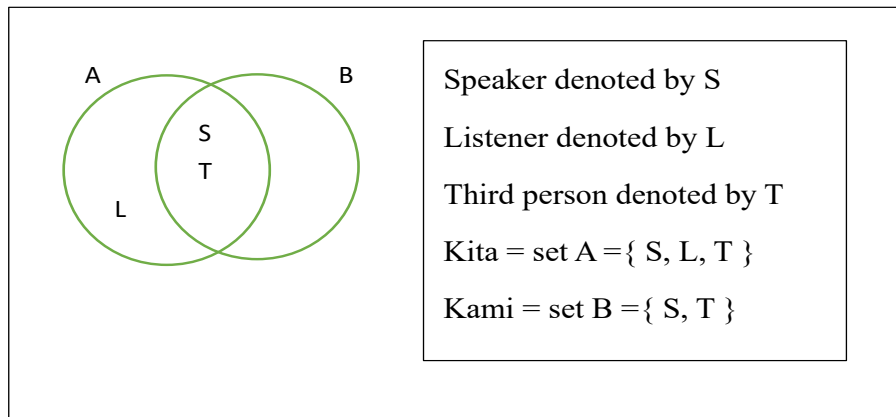


Figure 1. The Difference of ‘kita’ and ‘kami’

As illustrated in Figure 1, both ‘kita’ and ‘kami’ are found to intersect at $A \cap B$, indicating that both terms include the Speaker (S) and the Third Person (T). The crucial element is the listener (L). In order for the speaker to involve the listener in the conversation, it is necessary for the speaker to use the pronoun ‘kita’ in Standard Malay; the pronoun ‘kami’ is used otherwise. This illustrates that the speaker holds the authority to determine whether or not to involve the listener in the conversation. In addition, linguists and grammarians such as Arbak Othman (1989) also commented that the use of ‘kita’ indicates an invitation for the listener to become involved in the conversation, whereas the use of ‘kami’ implies that the listener is not invited to participate. If the essential element ‘listener’ is not invited in the conversation, then it can be argued that the use of ‘kami’ could only be a pronoun that performs descriptive function; it is unable to address the social needs of the interlocutors in the conversation. Therefore, the use of the form ‘kami-kami’ would be regarded as a grammatical error in Standard Malay. Whereas the use of ‘kita-kita’ must serve some special social functions that remain relevant and applicable. As the distinction between the plural personal pronouns ‘kita’ and ‘kami’ has been elucidated in the Figure 1, this paper will not

dwell on the nuances of 'kita' and 'kami'. Instead, it will investigate the reduplication of the personal pronoun 'kita-kita' and its social function. The personal pronoun 'kita' and its reduplication 'kita-kita' are the subjects of this investigation as they encompass all the elements present in a conversation: the speaker, the listener and the third person. The focus of this paper is not on 'kami' as this excludes an important element, namely the listener. The purpose of this explanation is to clarify the similarities and differences between the Malay pronouns 'kita' and 'kami'. As they both indicate 'we' and 'us' in English, it is important to distinguish between them to avoid confusion and ambiguity during the data analysis, description, and interpretation. It is therefore essential to provide this clarification before embarking on further discussion.

In this instance, if the term 'kita' undergoes a process of reduplication within the context of an active verbal exchange, what inferences might be drawn by the speaker? It is also pertinent to consider what the listener anticipates. Does the use of 'kita-kita' merely serve to replace the phrase 'saya dan awak' (you and I)? It would appear that its function has undergone a transformation. In what way does the use of 'kita-kita' in conversation serve a particular function? The variation of a static pronoun is often so slight that it is unnoticeable and its significance is minimal. Nevertheless, the illustration of this specific instance may assist in comprehending the notion that a minor linguistic discrepancy could signify a transformation in societal norms and human cognition within a particular historical context. One potential factor that may have initiated the reconstruction of the function of a semantically static pronoun is social demand. The objective of this study is to propose a hypothesis regarding the function of the reduplicated pronoun 'kita-kita' in Standard Malay as used in Malaysia. This will be achieved by examining the social context in which the pronoun is used and challenging the assumption that pronouns are static elements in the language.

It seems reasonable to posit that the grammatical reconstruction may have occurred when the form of the pronoun underwent a change. It is possible to envisage that, when the social context was taken into account, the logic and usage of personal pronouns, which are bound with certain social actions and statuses, may have undergone a change and expansion at the moment of speaking. Speakers must identify an optimal method for self-representation and obtain the requisite recognition. In order to achieve the users' intention and to maintain a certain degree of distance from other clans or political groups, the use of reduplicated pronouns may have played an active role in social communication.

In the observation of conversational interactions, it is assumed that the listeners are aware of the antecedent, namely the pronoun, due to their active involvement in the conversational exchange (Krauthamer, 2021). From the outset of the conversation, the speaker achieves self-actualisation through the use of appropriate pronouns, which also prompts the listener to engage in processing the discussion. The speaker, listener and third party are engaged in the process of establishing and asserting their respective statuses, identities and connections with one another. This may be the point at which the reconstruction process occurs. The existence of a linguistic phenomenon, such as the usage of the non-standard form of pronoun ‘kita-kita’, practised by a population, indicates the presence of collective needs. The social functions and pragmatic purposes of ‘kita-kita’ must be effective in order to promote its usage and acceptance within a specific society. The existence of this form, whether recognised as a standardised one or a variant, indicates a consensus and wide utility among the users. The advent of ‘kita-kita’ suggests the emergence of a new and indispensable function, which serves to meet the needs of the users within the given society.

Standard Malay, also known as Bahasa Melayu, has been in use for over two thousand years and is currently the official national language of Malaysia (Asmah Haji Omar, 2014). Malay reduplication is regarded as a pivotal morphological strategy for augmenting the lexicon and generating novel terms (Puteri Roslina, 2012). Reduplication is one of the three principle morphological processes in Malay-Indonesian besides affixation and compounding (Tadmor, 2018). The productivity of reduplication is a significant contributing factor to the continued vitality of the Malay language. In addition to its efficacy in augmenting lexical richness and expanding the semantic range of a morpheme, the practice of reduplication in the context of Malay language evolution is observed to manifest a multitude of functions, including those pertaining to social interaction and communication within the local community. Traditionally, the multifunctional nature of reduplication serves as a vital morphological mechanism that contributes to the stylistic richness and functional adaptability of Malay. To illustrate, a considerable number of partial reduplications in Malay have been incorporated into contemporary scientific and technological terminology, with some also being employed extensively in everyday communication (Junaini Kasdan et al., 2017). It seems reasonable to posit that reduplication must have evolved over time in order to meet the needs of expression and communication among interlocutors. This is an effective strategy for maintaining the vitality of the language. One might question whether it is

reasonable to suggest that reduplication is the sole factor determining the survival of a language. However, it is clear that it plays an essential role in maintaining the vitality of the Malay language, ensuring its continued viability and enabling it to evolve. In light of the aforementioned considerations, this paper seeks to investigate and examine the true nature of pronoun reduplication 'kita-kita' based on a corpus and corpus analysis, with a view to uncovering its potential functions, particularly in the social context.

2. Literature Review

The case of reduplication has captured the attention of grammarians and researchers in the fields of phonology (Goldsmith, 1979; Karubaba, 2017), morphology (Inkelas & Zoll, 2005; Inkelas & Downing 2015; Mohd Yunus Sharum 2013;), lexicography (Junaini Kasdan et al., 2017), semantics (Mohd Yunus Sharum et al., 2010), and comparative linguistics (Yuko, 2001; Nadarajan, 2006; Güçlü, 2017). Inkelas and Zoll (2005) posit that reduplication is a complex and dynamic morphophonological and semantic-syntactic process, whereby words are formed with specific social functions and sense-making strategies. A significant number of languages worldwide exhibit the reduplicative characteristic in their lexicons and syntactic structures. As indicated by Carl Rubino (2013) in his global investigation and survey of reduplication in *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online* (<http://www.wals.info/>), there are 368 languages with a reduplicative structure, 278 of which exhibit productive full and partial reduplication, 35 of which demonstrate only full reduplication, and 55 languages have some forms of reduplication but are morphologically and grammatically fossilised. The global distribution of reduplication, as developed by Rubino (2013), demonstrates that this linguistic feature is significant in numerous languages across a range of geographical regions. These include Austronesian languages spoken in the Pacific Islands, Philippines, Indonesia, Madagascar, Malaysia, Australia, South Asia, and numerous other regions across Africa, the Caucasus, and Amazonia.

The study by Inkelas and Downing (2015) demonstrated that morphological reduplication, which is associated with the doubling of a component of the base of a morpheme, has a variety of syntactic and semantic functions in different languages. In general, it expresses meanings related to pluralisation, variation, emphasis and frequency. In some Malayic languages, such as Malay, Palembang, Minangkabau, Javanese, Balinese and Acehnese, the semantic functions may include iteration, diversity, distribution, delimitation, resemblance, nominalisation, concession and so on

(Alsamadani & Taibah, 2019). It can therefore be surmised that the utilisation of reduplication amongst interlocutors must have constituted a pivotal element in the description or expression of concepts, whether in spatial, chronological or semantic terms, and in the formation of ideas.

However, Keevallik (2010) presented a challenge to the notion that the functions of reduplication are limited to intensity, duration, pluralisation, variation and emphasis. By demonstrating the interaction of syntactic reduplication in responses, mockery, urging, and in conjunction with affiliative or disaffiliative mood, confrontation with other speakers, reinforcement of answers, and non-elicited confirmation, Keevallik (2010) found that prosody and grammar shown in syntactic reduplication, particularly in Estonian, provide crucial insight into how language achieves social interaction in a specific context. It can therefore be reasonably deduced that syntactic or even lexical reduplication in certain languages may demonstrate some form of social functional characteristics. This study of Estonian reduplication provides a valuable contribution to the field, offering insights that can inform further exploration of the functions of Malay pronouns reduplication from a social perspective. In order to obtain further evidence, a preliminary observation was conducted. Following the preliminary observation of Malay terminology and social interaction within the Malay community, it was found that some reduplication in Malay exhibited similar phenomena and performed certain social functions within conversations and social activities. This observation suggests the existence of an as yet undiscovered social function associated with the reduplication of Malay personal pronouns.

The existing research on Malay reduplication is primarily concerned with its typology, lexical and syntactic semantics, and grammatical functions. The social function of Malay reduplication, particularly in pronouns, has not been the subject of significant research, largely because it is assumed that pronouns are static and inert in terms of their grammatical function. Consequently, only a limited number of studies on the reduplication of Malay personal pronouns can be identified, and these are worthy of discussion and serve as valuable references.

In the research conducted by Mardheya Alsamadani and Samar Taibah (2019) on the typology and functions of Palembang or Musi reduplication, it was observed that a modification of grammatical status occurs when the pronoun is reduplicated. It was discovered that the status of the first-person pronoun, such as 'aku', underwent a change when reduplication occurred. A transformation of semantics has occurred, whereby the plural reference of the pronoun has been deactivated, while another semantic function has been activated. In certain contexts, the semantics

of 'aku-aku' serve the function of iteration at the syntactic level. Nevertheless, Mardheya Alsamadani and Samar Taibah (2019) did not elaborate on the alteration of pronoun functions in the event of reduplication. They merely highlighted that the reduplication of pronouns is confined to the domain of iteration, rather than pluralisation. With regard to the reduplication of pronouns in Standard Malay, it would appear that the process in question gives rise to different effects depending on the particular pronouns concerned. Furthermore, the behaviour of the reduplicated pronouns differs from that observed in the Palembang dialect. This research examines the particular case in Standard Malay and investigates whether, in addition to stimulating the reference of iteration functions, the pronouns in question undergo a change in their social function with regard to the establishment of social distance or bonding at the moment of speaking.

In another Malayic linguistic study, Aziz and Nolikasari (2020) employed a descriptive qualitative research method to investigate the phenomenon of reduplication in the Jamee language. Jamee is a combination of the Minang and Acehnese languages, spoken widely in West Aceh, Southwest Aceh, Simeulue and Singkil in Indonesia among the Aneuk Jamee native population. The research introduced four types of reduplication: full reduplication, partial reduplication, lexicalised reduplication and affixed reduplication. It was found that full reduplication is the dominant and most widely used type among interlocutors. Aziz and Nolikasari (2020) primarily presented a typology of reduplication in the Jamee language, and they recommended further investigation into the morphology and functions of Jamee reduplication. While the aforementioned studies on the functions of Jamee focused on grammatical aspects, they also acknowledged the lack of understanding regarding the reduplication functions in social contexts. The researchers emphasise the necessity for further investigation and observation in different contexts.

3. Research Methodology

A corpus-based approach is an appropriate and effective method for studying a specific linguistic pattern and its distribution, such as the reduplicated pronoun 'kita-kita'. The quality and efficacy of a corpus-based study are contingent upon the level of representativeness, balance, and sampling. The representativeness of a general corpus depends upon the sampling of a diverse array of textual genres from the specified population. The objective of achieving balance can be attained by including as many varieties as possible within the population. Ultimately, this will result in the acquisition of a representative sample that accurately reflects the predominant characteristics of

the population in question (McEnery et al., 2006). In their 2020 study, Egbert et al. (2020) put forth a three-step framework for selecting an appropriate corpus for research purposes. The initial stage of the process is to ascertain the specific domain of the study in question. To ensure clarity in the research process, the corpus selection was conducted using digital media archives, showing the capacity to represent the full range of text types from the target domain in a more comprehensive manner. The size of the corpus was determined, with a view to ensuring the stability of the estimates to be produced. The metadata, documentation and text files of the corpus were examined in order to ensure its representativeness. The present study will adhere to these principles.

3.1 Corpora Selected

In order to gain insight into the social function of the pronoun reduplication ‘kita-kita’ in Standard Malay, an examination was conducted on the distribution of ‘kita-kita’ across two corpora. The initial corpus is the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Corpus, or *Korpus DBP*¹ in Malay. The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) in collaboration with Universiti Sains Malaysia established and developed the corpus in 1993. The corpus is derived from a range of contemporary sources, including modern oral transcript records, published books, magazines, newspapers, translated works, advertisements, brochures, poetry, play scripts, printed materials, reports, texts, and books published by the DBP. It is a government agency with the mandate of standardising the Malay language and is vested with the authority to regulate the usage, interpretation and translation of the Malay language in Malaysia. It is widely regarded as a reliable source for the investigation of Malay corpora. The total number of words in the corpus is approximately 135 million (<https://lamanweb.dbp.gov.my/pangkalan-data-korpus/>). The estimated time frame for the modern texts collected by DBP encompasses the period from the independence of Malaysia in the 1950s or 1960s until the present day, including some older manuscripts. The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Corpus (DBP), henceforth referred to as the DBP corpus, is deemed an appropriate source for this research project as it represents the Standard Malay language and encompasses the target domain

¹ The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) Corpus is available at <https://sbmb.dbp.gov.my/korpusdbp/SelectUserCat.aspx>

that this research seeks to investigate. In terms of balance, the DBP corpus comprises a wide range of data, and the sampling is adequate for the representation of the language.

The second corpus is a growing corpus registered under the copyright of the Australian National University, the Malay Concordance Project Corpus² (or MCP Corpus in short). The data of the corpus is consulted and contributed by scholars from more than 30 countries worldwide, comprising 5.8 million words of pre-modern historical manuscripts, old letters, classical Malay texts, old verses and extracts. These are available for consultation and download via <https://mcp.anu.edu.au/Q/mcp.html>. The estimated time frame for the composition of the pre-modern texts, spans from the early 1300s to the late 1950s. The Malay Concordance Project Corpus (MCP), as it is henceforth referred to, is an appropriate source for this research due to its distribution, balance and sampling criteria. It is a representative corpus with regard to distribution, and its data comprises a spectrum of valuable historical textual data in a great volume and a variety of genres.

The objective of utilising two corpora was to ascertain whether the pattern exhibits variation over time. The two corpora allowed for the creation of a continuous time frame, spanning from 1300 to the present. This may reveal a comprehensive pattern of the dissemination of 'kita-kita' over time. A different pattern may be indicative of a change in the tendency of language use of 'kita-kita'. Furthermore, the two corpora allowed the comparison of the frequency of other terms with similar meanings, such as 'kita sahaja' (only us) and 'kita berdua' (two of us). These terms share a similar meaning with 'kita-kita'. A comparison of the data can reveal how 'kita-kita' has evolved in competition with 'kita sahaja' and 'kita berdua' over time.

4. Data Analysis

A total of 21 instances of the word 'kita-kita' were identified in the MCP Corpus. The data is presented in Table 1, with some instances excluded for the purposes of this analysis. These include 'berkita-kita' and 'terkitai-kitai', which are not the focus of this study and were therefore removed manually, thus not included in the final count. It is evident that some instances are not reduplication, as evidenced by the example from the text *Pelayaran Abdullah ke Kelantan* from the year 1838: "Baiklah kita berjaga kampung kita; kalau barangkali datang orang mengusik kita kita hentam

² The Malay Concordance Project (MCP) Corpus: <https://mcp.anu.edu.au/Q/searches.html>

akan dia" (translated as "to be sure, we will defend our homeland; if they come and attack us we will strike them"). In the sentence "kalau barangkali datang orang mengusik kita," the pronoun "kita" functions as an object, whereas in the subsequent sentence, "kita hentam akan dia," it functions as a subject. This formation is an "object-subject," where the two pronouns have distinct grammatical functions. Consequently, it should be excluded from the list of target words.

As illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 2, the personal pronoun ‘kita-kita’ is the most frequently used in the newspaper *Saudara* during the period between 1931 and 1940. In the periodical *Majlis*, within the same time frame, the personal pronoun ‘kita-kita’ has been used on four occasions. The frequency of ‘kita-kita’ is almost imperceptible and inconsequential in the older texts and articles published prior to the 1930s. It is therefore evident that the year 1930 marks the point at which the usage of ‘kita-kita’ increased significantly.

Table 1. The Distribution of ‘kita-kita’ in Different Materials in the MCP Corpus from 1830 to 1950

Materials categories	Frequency	Year
Letters to Von de Wall (Surat kepada Von de Wall) (al-sanah 1283)	1	1866-1867
Articles from the magazine <i>Al-Imam</i>	1	1906-1908
Articles in the magazine <i>Majlis</i>	4	1932-1935
Articles in the newspaper <i>Saudara</i>	15	1931-1940.
Total	21	

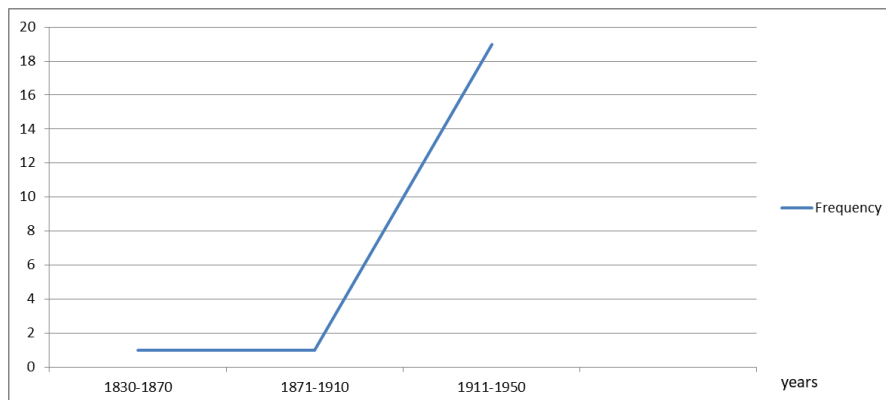


Figure 2. Frequency of ‘kita-kita’ from 1830 to 1950 in the MCP corpus

A detailed examination of the lexico-grammar features of the word 'kita-kita' from the data set in question does not yield a satisfactory explanation. In order to identify the factors which caused the sudden increase in the usage of the pronoun 'kita-kita' in the 1930s, it is necessary to examine the socio-historical changes in the context.

Given the elevated frequency of the pronoun 'kita-kita' in the newspaper *Saudara*, it is prudent to commence the investigation with an examination of the publication's history. *Saudara* was one of the most influential newspapers during the 1930s. It was a Penang weekly that published articles from the Malay States and the Strait Settlements between the years 1928 and 1941. In 1930, the newspaper was printed once a week with four pages at the beginning. By May of that year, the number of copies printed had increased to 1,700, with an average of 12 pages per edition. It purported to have a broad readership encompassing the Malay Archipelago and Peninsula, Siam, and the Saigon region. Additionally, the newspaper attracted an intellectual readership from Mecca, Egypt, London, and Europe (Wan Suhana Wan Sulong, 2006). Wan Suhana Wan Sulong (2006) posits that *Saudara* placed a significant emphasis on the promotion of Islamic brotherhood, the unification of Malays, and the pursuit of a pure Malay identity. The educated Malay readership gradually developed an ethnic identity and a sense of belonging as a result of the influence of *Saudara*. The pronoun 'kita-kita' was employed to enhance the awareness of identity and reinforce the cohesion within the Malay community. As illustrated in Figure 2, the pronoun 'kita-kita' is used with greater frequency in the newspaper *Saudara* than in other periodicals and texts, as evidenced in Table 1. The newspaper *Saudara* benefited from its status as a regional media outlet, facilitating the transmission of political ideology and the construction of a social network of Malay intellectuals dispersed across different locations. This was made possible by the use of the pronoun 'kita-kita' in the ethnic discourse, which created a distinct temporal and spatial context. During the 1930s and 1940s, the rise of anti-colonial sentiments and the protestations against the unfair economic segregation policy paved the way for the emergence of Malay nationalism.

Malay intellectuals embarked on a quest to define Malay identity and shape their political status through the medium of the newspaper *Saudara*. As members of the Malay community, their actions were driven by a desire to foster national consciousness and awareness. The frequent appearance of the term 'kita-kita' may be indicative of a growing awareness. While the colonial British Malaya government was ostensibly intent on suppressing such awareness, it inadvertently

facilitated the ascendance of Malay nationalism. Civil servants in the education department during that period, such as Richard James Wilkinson (1867-1941) and Richard Olof Winstedt (1878-1966), played a pivotal role in instilling a sense of national identity among Malay students and intellectuals. Soda (2001) discovered that Winstedt, the director of Education in the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States from 1924 to 1931, had developed and written Malay geography and history textbooks for Malay schools. Despite his foreign nationality, Winstedt identified with the Malay identity. He employed the use of 'kita' in the textbook, thereby shifting the perspective from that of the colonisers to that of the colonised. Winstedt's actions as an insider provide an excellent illustration of how the pronoun 'kita' can alter one's perspective and influence the formation of Malay identity during a specific historical period. The use of the pronoun 'kita-kita' served to reinforce the Malay identity while simultaneously promoting inclusivity among peers and exclusivity from non-Malay. Consequently, the pronoun 'kita-kita' exhibits dual functions within discourse and communication, namely to affirm the boundaries of the relationship and maintain a sense of distance from others. Those who are already accepted as insiders are able to assert their identities, whereas outsiders have yet to be permitted to participate. The following example illustrates how the pronoun 'kita-kita' contributed to the formation of a Malay identity and the establishment of Malay nationalism:

...Di dalam pada masa dan kenyataan yang kasar barulah setengah daripada **kita-kita** dapat memikirkan kelayakan "Paspam" pada waktu akhbar "Saudara" masih hidup dengan tiada payah ibu pejabat mengeluarkan belanja berkenaan dengan perkara itu. (paragraph in *Saudara* 11Aug37:11) translated as "In these harsh times and reality, only half of us could think of the merits of "Paspam" when the newspaper *Saudara* was still active and it didn't take any funding coming from the head office.

In the description above, the pronoun 'kita-kita' is estimated to have represented approximately 8,000 members of PASPAM during the 1930s. PASPAM (Persaudaraan Sahabat Pena Malaya) was a Malay literary and linguistic development organisation established by Malay educated intellectuals based on the newspaper *Saudara* in April 1934. The primary objective was to encourage Malay intellectuals and writers to become members, to promote the reading and

writing of Malay books among them, and to assist them in publishing books, dictionaries, and articles. The organisation was driven by ethnic and political motivations (Matheson-Hooker, 2021). It is evident that the existence of PASPAM was contingent upon the publication of the newspaper *Saudara*, which provided the organisation with financial support. The ideas promoted by *Saudara* would be realised by PASPAM. The pronoun 'kita' was deemed insufficient for the purpose of uniting the members, and thus 'kita-kita' was employed to reinforce the sense of fraternal solidarity and cohesion amongst them. The term 'kita-kita' was not simply a means of mobilising the entire membership; rather, it was a construct that was adapted to suit a particular context in which a sense of social commitment and identity was required in order to pursue a higher purpose.

Following Malaya's independence in 1957 and the formation of Malaysia in 1963, the socio-historical environment underwent a transformation, as did the sentiments and perceptions of the people. A review of the data from the DBP corpus revealed that there were only 16 instances of 'kita-kita' documented between 1960 and 2018. However, two of the instances were duplicates and five did not align with the specified target words. Following the removal of seven instances, a total of nine were extracted and subjected to analysis, the results of which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Distribution of 'kita-kita' in Different Materials in DBP Corpus during 1960-2019

Materials categories (genres)	Frequency	Distributed in specific year
Political articles	1	2003
Magazines' articles intended for targeted readers	3	1997,2015, 2019
Literature, cultural, and religious articles in certain magazines	5	1965,1969,1979, 1999, 2018
Total	9	

As demonstrated in Figure 3, the frequency of 'kita-kita' exhibits a notable decline following the attainment of independence, in comparison to the data presented in Table 1 and Figure 2. Additionally, the frequency of 'kita-kita' demonstrates a fluctuating pattern, ranging between 0 and 3 from 1960 to 2019.

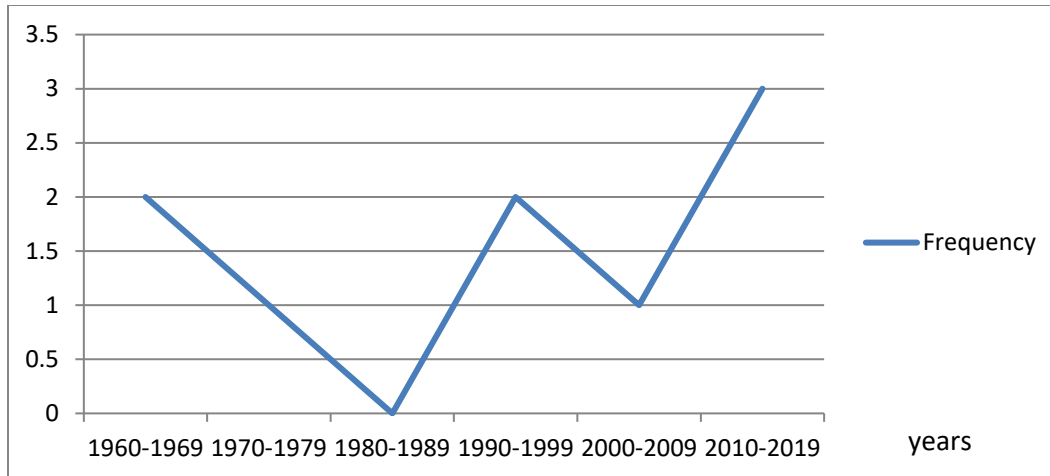


Figure 3. Frequency of ‘kita-kita’ during 1960-2019 in DBP corpus

The reduplicated pronoun ‘kita-kita’ is typically associated with literary, cultural and religious contexts, rather than the political sphere. It is evident that the function of ‘kita-kita’ evolves from serving as a distinctive device for instigating a political movement to becoming a non-political organisational instrument, particularly in light of the fact that the objective of nationalism had been accomplished. To illustrate, the DBP corpus reveals the use of ‘kita-kita’ in a social context, as evidenced below:

Sesiapa jua, apatah lagi dalam kalangan ‘**kita-kita** ini’ dan anggota kerabat GAPENA yang sentiasa terlibat... (appeared in the article “Kerelatifan Budaya Catatan Pengalaman” in *Pengalaman*, 2018) literally translated as “Anyone, not to mention among ‘ourselves’ and GAPENA members who are always involved in ...”

In the extract above, the term ‘kita-kita’ is employed to serve as a reminder of the obligations and the identity of the members of the organisation GAPENA (Gabungan Persatuan Penulis Nasional), which is translated into English as The Federation of Malaysian National Writers Association. A sense of responsibility has been publicly proclaimed through the usage of ‘kita-kita’, which serves to assemble all members involved in the promotion of the national language.

The term ‘kita-kita’ is frequently encountered in everyday discourse and informal settings. A review of the DBP corpus reveals that conversations involving ‘kita-kita’ are relatively common.

As shown in this example “Biar **kita-kita** saja yang tahu.” (appeared in Korban Kasih 2, Keluarga, 2015) literally translated as “Let us be the only ones who know.”

In this context, the function of ‘kita-kita’ is to serve as a binding force between the two individuals involved at the moment of speaking. The speaker proposes a social compact to the listener, which is an exclusive commitment between the two parties involved. The speaker establishes a restriction in the context of an interpersonal relationship through the use of ‘kita-kita’. It can therefore be concluded that a social attachment has been established. Should the situation continue to progress, two potential outcomes may be foreseen: 1) The bond is secured with the consent of the listener. If both the speaker and the listener abide by the agreement, the action will be carried out and the social relationship or bond between both parties may be maintained. Otherwise, 2) the bond is broken. The listener may betray the agreement and violate the treaty for certain reasons or factors. As a result, the social relationship or bonding between the speaker and the listener is likely to be irrevocably broken, and the pact between them will fail. This illustrates that the term ‘kita-kita’ serves a non-political social function in informal social interactions following the independence.

In this informal social context, the use of ‘kita-kita’ facilitates the initiation of a social interaction between interlocutors at the moment of speaking. The use of ‘kita-kita’ serves to stimulate the reactant in the conversation, whereby the semantics of the pronoun are activated to accommodate the specific context. This immediately sets the interlocutors to engage in the social interaction. It seems plausible to suggest that this interaction may facilitate the construction of identity for each individual in society. Furthermore, it appears to serve a specific social function, enabling individuals to bond with one another while simultaneously maintaining a safe boundary between the speaker and the listener. This boundary can be conceptualised as a distinction between 'me and you', 'us and them', or even 'him and her'.

In examining the social function of ‘kita-kita’ based on the MCP and DBP corpora, it is worthwhile to compare the frequency of other terms such as 'kita sahaja' (only us) and 'kita berdua' (two of us). These two terms possess an identical semantic function to ‘kita-kita’ as demonstrated in Table 3.

Table 3. The Distribution of ‘kita-kita’, ‘kita berdua’ and ‘kita sahaja’ in MCP and DBP Corpora

	Frequency in MCP corpus (1830-1950)	Frequency in DBP corpus (1960-2019)
Kita-kita	21	9
Kita berdua	22	89
Kita sahaja	22	94

A comparison of the forms 'kita berdua' and 'kita sahaja' in two corpora, as illustrated in Table 3 above, reveals that the reduplicated pronoun ‘kita-kita’ co-existed with both forms during the period of British colonial rule and the pre-independent era. At that specific point in time, the use of ‘kita-kita’ was not perceived as a grammatical error or mistake. The terms "kita-kita," "kita berdua," and "kita sahaja" were identified in the newspapers *Saudara* and *Majlis*. Following the 1960s, the frequency of ‘kita-kita’ decreased rapidly. It may be inferred that this decline was due to the inability of ‘kita-kita’ to compete with 'kita sahaja' and 'kita berdua' in social interaction usage, either after 1960 or after national independence. This is illustrated in Figure 4.

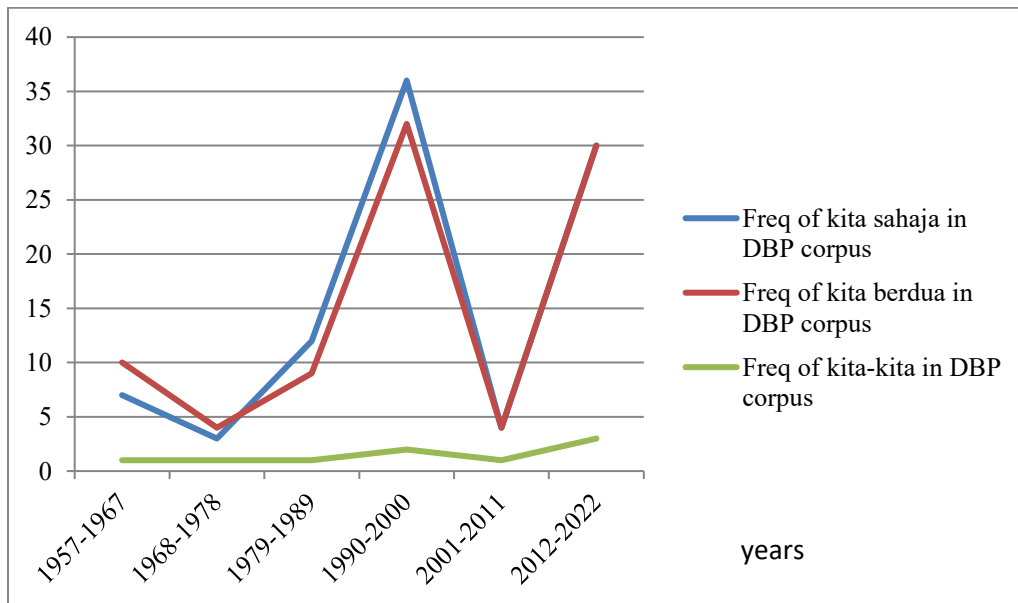


Figure 4. Frequency of ‘kita sahaja’, ‘kita berdua’ and ‘kita-kita’ in DBP Corpus during 1960-2019

Prior to independence, ‘kita-kita’ fulfilled a socio-political role, fostering unity and a sense of identity among Malay intellectuals and readers. It seems plausible to suggest that the repeated

use of the pronoun 'kita-kita' may have been a deliberate and strategic decision driven by social and political considerations. Upon the completion of its initial objective, the targeted function would subsequently decline and shift to other functions. To address the perceived tension between the decline of 'kita-kita' and its continued use, this study adopts a diachronic discourse perspective. While the attainment of independence and the subsequent standardisation of Malay grammar led to a rapid decline of 'kita-kita' in formal, institutionalized writing, the form has persisted -and arguably thrived-as a vernacular social marker. The usage of 'kita-kita' in modern context functions as a 'micro-level social action' to signal "in-group" exclusivity (e.g. "Ini antara kita-kita sahaja"), a nuance that the standard singular 'kita' does not fully capture.

In order to justify how 'kita-kita' performs its social action and fulfil its social meaning, the following Table 4 is designed to categorise the social actions of 'kita-kita' and their pragmatic functions. This Functional Analysis Table demonstrates how 'kita-kita' functions as a social marker rather than a grammatical oversight.

Table 4. The Mapping of the Social Actions and the Pragmatic Functions of ‘kita-kita’

Social Action	Pragmatic Function	Contextual Example (from corpus)	Social meaning
Gate keeping	Define ‘in-group’ or ‘out-group’	“Biar kita-kita saja yang tahu.” literally translated as “We are only ones that know about it” (Fatimah Saidin. Korban Kasih 2. Sastera, 2015)	Limits the flow of information to a trusted circle; establish exclusivity.
Solidarity	Reduce social distance	“Ini adalah satu fenomena yang menakutkan kita, terutamanya kita-kita yang ada anak dara atau anak perempuan.” literally translated as “It is a frightening phenomenon to those who have daughters.” (Parlimen Malaysia. DN 27072006. Parlimen, 2006)	Creates empathy by emphasizing shared struggles or common socioeconomic status.
Intimacy/ Casualness	Informal framing	“Jom lepak, kita-kita je pun.” literally translated as “Come on, let’s hang out, just us.”	Signals a relaxed environment where formal codes of conduct are suspended.
Intensification	Plurality emphasis	““Pedulikan orang. Kita-kita. Orang-orang.” literally translated as “Don’t you care about other people. Us. Them.” (Alias Ali. Resah. Sastera, 1965)	Emphasizes that the specific group mentioned (and no one else) is responsible.

5. Conclusion

In his Politics, Aristotle posited that humans are political animals by nature and must live in a society (Stumpf & Fieser, 2008). Given this political nature, humans learn that collaboration with one another is essential for survival and flourishing within an organised system. The advancement of effective communication thus facilitates the achievement of this objective. Human beings employ a range of communication strategies to achieve a number of different objectives, including the formation of alliances, the assembly of members, the seeking of mutual understanding and the

bonding of individuals. In order to mobilise the workforce and promote community spirit, pronoun usage plays a role in achieving its social function. Those who are active members of a community or an association tend to use pronouns such as "we" to foster a sense of belonging and "us" to initiate social movements. In familial and social contexts, parents or the head of the clan are aware of the utility of pronouns such as "we" or "us" in fostering solidarity and enhancing group identity.

The study of the reduplicated pronoun 'kita-kita' has revealed insights into the evolution of socio-political dynamics in Malaysia during the pre- and post-independence eras. This challenges the assumption that pronouns are unchanging and static linguistic elements, resistant to change in any context. Indeed, some pronouns have undergone certain variations and have played a pivotal role in influencing and shaping societal developments. The analysis of corpora MCP and DBP reveals that 'kita-kita' played a role in the independence movement initiated by Malay intellectuals and journalists. The function of 'kita-kita' was to facilitate the assembly of members of the Malay society, promote solidarity among Malay people, establish Malay identity and pave the way for nationalism. Following the attainment of independence and the standardisation of Malay grammar, the usage of 'kita-kita' decreased rapidly. Its social function was subsequently shifted to and thrived in the context of non-formal conversations between members of the community. The findings illustrate how 'kita-kita' moved from the Formal Core (pre-independence/ early standardisation) into Sociolinguistic Periphery (modern informal usage). This migration does not signify the 'death' of the form but rather functional specialization. Its survival is a sustainability mechanism where it allows the Malay language to express nuanced social hierarchies that the standardized 'kita' (inclusive 'we') cannot distinctively mark on its own.

It should be noted that the analyses were based on targeted written texts and old manuscripts, which may have resulted in limitations in terms of distributional data. Given the limited size of the research subject sample, there is scope for more in-depth analysis to confirm the observations discussed herein. In order to achieve a more accurate and representative analysis, it would be beneficial to include a greater number of oral transcripts or records in the corpora. Moreover, the findings may remain hypothetical and appear unconvincing due to the fact that the 'kita-kita' found in the different grammatical features, expressions and syntactic structures in the old written manuscripts provided by MCP Corpus is different from the aforementioned categories in the contemporary records presented by DBP Corpus. This discrepancy may influence the assessment and classification of the reduplicated pronoun 'kita-kita' and its associated function. It is therefore

essential to examine the contextual background of the research subject and to make rational assumptions based on the quantitative results of the corpus analysis. Notwithstanding these limitations, this research makes a contribution in terms of a different quantitative approach to the discovery of the social function of this particular case. The corpus-based quantitative methodology has furnished more tangible evidence in demonstrating the pattern of 'kita-kita' while situating it in a temporal, spatial, and material context. The proposed method is practical and has demonstrated a way of comparing the pattern of a particular morpheme in two corpora that are collocated chronologically. This would facilitate the establishment of a general pattern of morphemic development.

This study demonstrates that the morphological resilience of reduplication is central to the sustainability of the Malay language. By relating the current findings back to the initial claim, it is evident that 'kita-kita' serves as a bridge between historical heritage and modern identity negotiation. The survival of these non-standard forms in reduplication suggests that social utility often outweighs prescriptive grammatical pressure. Thus, the persistence of 'kita-kita' is not deviation from standardisation, but a testament to the language's ability to evolve socio-politically while maintaining its core structural logic. Further research will aim to expand the data set and include additional observations on other reduplication forms. Additionally, the social functions of the reduplicated pronouns found in other Malayic languages, which have not been previously examined in the literature, will be investigated.

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