

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Introduction

Effective communication is essential in conveying one's thoughts and ideas. Almost all activities carried out by people involve communication be it written or spoken. Communication serves a variety of purposes. In fact each community albeit culture has its own means of communications, as an example, it is observed that within each ethnic group in a community there is a variety of languages and dialects. These dialects are employed in the name of communication.

“Given the multiple varieties of language within the communicative repertoire of a community, and the subset of varieties available to its sub groups and individuals, speakers must select the code and interaction strategy to be used in any specific context.”

Saville Troike (1982:23)

In other words, Saville-Troike reiterates that effective communication will take place if one is aware of the interactive strategy which should be employed in a particular context.

In order to ensure that effective verbal communication takes place, getting the real contextual meaning is important. This is the focus of pragmatics which is the science of language in as much as a science that focuses on humans using the language. In the context of verbal discourse, the language user is often the center of attention. This is set apart from the classical linguistic discipline which focuses on the result of the language users' activity, the structures that the grammar allows them to produce. Pragmatics is interested in the process of producing language and its producers, not just in the product which is language.

## **1.1 Background of the Study**

Often in a conversation, participants employ different means of communicating their thoughts. They can either choose to convey their ideas or thoughts in a direct manner, hence the listener is able to easily understand or catch the meaning which is conveyed. On the other hand, they can also communicate the ideas in an indirect manner. In this case, the listener is able to understand the conveyed meaning if he or she shares the same experience or even knowledge about the issue. This means there should be some cooperative effort between the participants. The participants, in other words should focus on an accepted direction in their conversations so that there will be no miscommunication or misunderstanding.

Speaking is often perceived as a skill that comes naturally to an individual. However, effective communication can only be attained if participants are able to interpret utterances. Speakers may often say something but mean something else, or what they say may have an underlying meaning.

If speakers share the same knowledge, meaning in an utterance is not lost. On the other hand, if speakers do not share the same background knowledge or even experience, chances are the intended meaning may not be understood. It is essential to be understood; otherwise it could lead to a misunderstanding or even communication breakdown.

## **1.2 Theoretical Perspective**

The British philosopher H.P. Grice (1972) put forth the idea that language is based on a form of cooperation between speakers. He stated that for language to be meaningful, participants in the conversation must cooperate in the way they speak and listen. And in a conversation, the significance of an utterance includes both what is said (what is explicitly stated) and what is implicated (the implicit, unstated part of the utterance ).

Grice's maxims help the speaker convey more than what is explicitly stated. This is done through conversational implicatures which follow from maxims of truthfulness, informativeness, relevance and clarity which speakers are assumed to observe.

Grice proposed the Cooperative Principle (CP) in the pursuit of smooth communication. If there is a form of cooperative effort amongst speakers, every

participant will return with a reply which is suitable in a conversation, and in the process allow and encourage other speakers to do the same.

### **1.3 Purpose Of The Study**

This is a study of the conversations of teachers in a Malaysian secondary school. The conversations are ordinary face-to face verbal interactions that occur in informal settings. This type of communication is often taken for granted as it occurs routinely in our daily life. This is what the researcher aims to capture in her recordings of authentic conversations.

Little attention is paid to the skill and ingenuity of the participants as they make their contributions in these verbal interactions. The main thrust of the analysis is on the verbal output, which is on what is said. But ordinary spoken communication is frequently supported by non-verbal contributions of the speakers.

By analyzing the conversations of teachers, the researcher attempts to observe if there is a cooperative effort amongst them. The researcher would also explore the violations of the maxims and the strategies used in relation to this. The researcher also attempts to observe if the speakers' culture affects the way they speak.

Thus the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To observe if there are any adherence to Grice's maxims in the conversations.
2. To see if there are any evidence of violations to Grice's maxims in the conversations.
3. To observe the strategies used by speakers in conveying implied meaning in the conversations.
4. To see to what extent the Malaysian culture has influenced the speakers.

#### 1.4 Research Questions

Bearing in mind the objectives of the study, the research questions for this study are as follows:

- a) To what extent do the teachers conversations adhere to Grice's maxims?
- b) What evidence is there of violations to the maxims?
- c) What are the strategies used by speakers in conveying Implied meaning?
- d) Are there any features in the conversation that reflect the influence of Malaysian culture?

## **1.5 The Significance of This Study**

Teachers in the English Language classroom in Malaysian schools at present focus more in the teaching of grammar and the four main skills which is listening, speaking, reading and writing. The speaking component which is included in the syllabus is geared towards preparing students to speak about current issues.

Presently stress and importance is given to the understanding of direct meaning in oral communication. Subtler effects of communication are not given enough importance in the curriculum. In other words, students are not challenged into thinking beyond the given literal meaning. Teachers should teach students effective communication. The students should be aware that effective communication is not just exchanging views or ideas. They should be trained to understand the different levels of meaning in communication.

The pragmatic domain should not be ignored in the teaching and learning process. By being more aware of the pragmatic domain, teachers would be able to impart to their students adequate and appropriate knowledge in order to achieve effective communication. Furthermore, with the introduction of literature in schools, teachers need to empower students with the ability to read in-between-the-lines. By doing so, this will initiate students into communicating their ideas not only in written form but also verbally, in a more effective manner.

## **1.6 The Limitations of This Study**

This study is based on audio recordings of authentic spoken discourse, as in conversations of teachers in a secondary school. It analyses ordinary conversations as in informal spoken discourse where certain language errors may be apparent. Pronunciation, grammar and syntactic errors are outside the scope of this study as this study only attempts to analyse the meaning of utterances rather than the errors. Though the researcher has attempted to capture and transcribe almost all the exchanges, some loss in terms of details of gestures and facial expressions did occur as the focus was in audio rather than video recordings.

The attention is also on ordinary conversations in an informal setting. Therefore, this study does not make any claims about formal spoken discourse.

The focus of this study is on pragmatic features using the technique of conversational analysis. Gender issues therefore lie outside the main focus of this study. However, gender differences may be taken into account in so far as they shed light on the pragmatic features in the verbal interactions.

The authentic conversations are often recorded without the knowledge of the speakers concerned to maintain a natural and informal environment. Since the recordings are done in a natural setting, interferences in the form of the other speakers quipping into the conversations. This then could sometimes steer the conversations elsewhere. So, the topics of conversations often vary according to the different participants who join in the conversations.

Time is also another factor which may contribute to the sudden end of a conversation as each time the school bell rings, the teachers will leave for their respective classroom. This then abruptly puts an end to conversations, which is a common feature in the staff room as teachers continually come and go according to their time-table.