

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction.

This study employs the Gricean framework, the Cooperative Principle and the four maxims to analyze the informal conversations of teachers in a secondary school. The focus of this chapter is on the methodology employed in collecting data for the purpose of analysis. This chapter includes the identification of the instruments used, subjects and method of data analysis.

3.1 Instruments

The primary data for this study was obtained by means of audio recordings. As gestures and facial expressions could not be recorded via an audio medium, observations were also made by the researcher. Details of gestures and facial expressions which play a vital role in effective communication were observed and noted by the researcher. A set of questionnaire was also employed as a research tool in order to gather additional information and for purposes of triangulation.

3.2 Data Collection Procedure

This study employed a qualitative research method to analyze the conversation of teachers in a secondary school. A quantitative research method was also used to analyze the data from the questionnaire.

The procedure which the researcher went through in order to collect the relevant data for analysis was firstly, recording the informal conversations of teachers in a secondary school. This was complemented with observations of subjects throughout the conversations. Para linguistic features were also observed and noted to assist the researcher in the analysis.

After that, a questionnaire was formulated and randomly administered to one hundred and fifty teacher respondents from various schools and colleges in order to gain a fuller and more accurate picture of the study. This is also done in the interest of triangulation and to complement the findings arrived at. The researcher was responsible for the administration and collection of the questionnaire.

The main data was drawn from teachers' conversations over a six-month period. The fact that the researcher was also a teacher in the same school greatly facilitated the process of data collection. Her good relationship with her colleagues built up over time enabled her to gain the trust and cooperation needed for the data collection. All the teachers who participated in the conversations allowed recordings to be made and co-operated fully in the process. They were assured that strict confidentiality would be maintained at all times and that no names would be divulged.

These audio recordings were later transcribed.

3.2.1 The Audio Recordings

The main research instrument used in this study is audio recording. The research is primarily based on three audio recordings of conversations amongst teachers in a secondary school. This covered primarily verbal face-to-face interactions. Attention was also paid to non - verbal elements in order to assess to what extent they were congruent with the verbal utterances. The recordings were done at three different times and at three different settings within the school. The participants were told about the intentions of the researcher in gathering authentic data through the recording of conversations well in advance of each recording. The researcher obtained permission to tape the conversations but also mentioned that in the interest of enhancing naturalness in the interactions, the recording would be carried out at any time of the week without prior notification. The subjects agreed to the arrangement. The teachers have been teaching in the same school for at least eight years. As such they already know each other very well and have a good working relationship.

A Panasonic RQ-L10 recorder with an in-built microphone was used for recording purposes. The first recording took about 50 minutes while the second and third recording took about 45 minutes each.

The table below summarizes the information given in the previous page.

Recording	Duration	Time	Place
1 st Recording	50 minutes	9.00 am-9.50am	Staff-room
2 nd Recording	45 minutes	10.00 am-10.45	School canteen
3 rd Recording	45 minutes	1.15 pm-2.00 pm	School hall

Table 1: Details of Recording

The recording was played over and over again for transcription purposes. Given the informal nature of the setting while the recording was going on, it should be stressed that though the same participants were there most of the time, there were other teachers who participated in the conversation for a while and then moved away when they had a class or had to leave for some other reason. External noise did make the process of recording a little difficult but it was not a major problem.

Scenario of Recording 1

The first recording took place in the staff-room. This is an area at the far end of the staff room, away from the teachers' tables. Those who choose to sit here often read the newspapers or chat with their colleagues. Most of the time other teachers will walk in after class and join in the conversation. The researcher had the tape recorder on her lap covered by a newspaper and was able to proceed with the recording without much difficulty.

Scenario of Recording 2

The second recording took place at the school canteen. Participants were having their meal while having a conversation at the same time. The tape recorder was left in the researcher's handbag which was deliberately left open. It was placed on a chair beside the researcher. Since the researcher was sitting between the participants, apart from the external noise, there were no major problems in the recording. Since the conversation took place in the school canteen, other teachers kept entering the conversations and leaving it, making contributions to the on-going conversations. The focus in the recording was more on the interactions between 'fixed' participants.

Scenario of Recording 3

The third recording took place in the school hall. It was just after school was dismissed. A meeting was scheduled to be held at 2.30 p.m. and there were a few teachers who had come early. At first it was very noisy. As the school hall is located in the middle of the four main buildings, there was a lot of activity as well as noise as students were either going home or preparing for their afternoon co-curricular activities. But the noise subsided after a while. The researcher was seated amidst a group of teachers. As with the second recording, the researcher placed her tape recorder in her bag which was again deliberately opened for the purpose of recording the conversation. It was placed on a chair beside the researcher. The participants were made up of those seated near the tape recorder as well as those on the way to the canteen, entering the conversation and contributing to it before moving away. Again, the focus in the recording was more on the interactions between 'fixed' participants.

3.2.1.1 The Transcription Conventions

The transcription system used by the researcher is based on the one developed at the English Language Institute, University of Michigan for their MICASE (Michigan Corpus of Academia Spoken English) project.

The following are the notations used for the discourse transcription of the data.

CATEGORIES	EXAMPLES
Hesitation	Hmm, ah
Pauses	/ short pause ,// long pause
Incomplete sentences	...
Code switching	<i>Italic words</i>
Other speakers adding their views	\
Sentence completion by other speakers	[']
Laughter	@ @
Nodding of head while speaking	< >
Speech overlap	{ }

Table 2: Transcription Notations

3.2.2 Observation and Field Notes

Though the emphasis is on verbal interaction, attention was also paid to non-verbal features with a view of establishing whether there was any congruence between the two. As a participant in the discussion, apart from contributing to keep the conversation going, it was easy to observe the participants and note the paralinguistic features throughout the conversations.

Field notes were also taken based on the observation. The researcher ensured that she did not employ these strategies in a very obtrusive manner. By doing it subtly, participants were not aware that they were actually being observed for their body language or mannerisms.

3.2.3 Questionnaire

The third instrument in collecting the data was through the distribution of a set of questionnaire (Appendix 4). It consisted of ten questions. The researcher was actively involved in the distribution and collection of the questionnaire.

The respondents for the questionnaire were again the teachers of the same school and also teachers from various other schools and a college i.e., Sekolah Menengah Jalan Cochrane, Cheras; Sekolah Menengah Taman Petaling, Petaling Jaya; Petaling Jaya; Sekolah Menengah Sungai Manggis Banting; Sekolah Menengah Methodist, Banting and Maktab Perguruan Ilmu Khas, Cheras. The questionnaire was distributed to subjects from

other schools to gather more valid data to represent a wider range of teachers or discourse participants. The findings were meant to assist the researcher in the research.

3.3 Subjects

The subjects of the recorded conversations were teachers of Sekolah Menengah Jalan Cochrane, Cheras. These subjects are the researcher’s colleagues.

The researcher decided to gather data from her own colleagues for the following reasons:

- i) they share the same experience and vocation
- ii) they are roughly of the same age
- iii) they get along with one another well.

Being comfortable with one another is essential, as it enables them to be more open and thus able to communicate better without any reservations. The fact that they have a close rapport and have been working together for some time allows them to speak openly on any issue.

A profile of the subjects is given below.

Subject	Age	Sex	Race
SV	30	Female	Indian
SM	39	Female	Indian
ZR	39	Female	Malay
AZ	28	Female	Chinese
SK	37	Female	Indian
ZJ	35	Female	Malay

Table 3: Recording 1

Subject	Age	Sex	Race
ZR	39	Female	Malay
SK	37	Female	Indian
KG	35	Female	Malay
H	29	Female	Chinese
A	29	Female	Malay
F	32	Female	Chinese

Table 4: Recording 2

Subject	Age	Sex	Race
SCK	41	Female	Chinese
WAK	36	Female	Chinese
AA	28	Female	Malay
PS	45	Male	Indian
IR	32	Male	Malay
STM	40	Male	Chinese
HTY	40	Female	Chinese
SM	39	Female	Indian
SK	37	Female	Indian

Table 5: Recording 3

All three recordings consist of different participants. All the teachers are from the same school and have working experience of about seven to twenty five years. A majority of them have been teaching in the same school for more than eight years. As such, they know one another quite well.

It is interesting to note that the majority of the participants in this research are female teachers. This could not be helped as statistic do show that there are more female than male teachers in schools. This is evident in this particular school where 90 0/0 of the teachers are female. Gender here does not in any way affect the findings but could be a useful area for further research especially in relation to conversational implicature. Women generally take the indirect approach in saying something as opposed to men who are more direct.

3.4 Method of Data Analysis

The Gricean framework is employed in the analysis of this data. The researcher will firstly identify samples which adhere to the maxims and the Co-operative Principle. After that, samples from the data will be provided to identify the violations of the said principle.

A frequency count is carried out to identify the number of times violations occurred in each maxim. The figures and percentage of the frequency count is then tabulated.