

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This study is an analysis of informal conversations among secondary school teachers using the Gricean framework. The data was drawn principally from audio-recordings. This was supplemented by data obtained by means of a questionnaire and direct observations. In the interest of enhancing theoretical and data sensitivity, meticulous field notes were recorded throughout the data-gathering process. This greatly facilitated the analysis and interpretation of data.

In the analysis, attention was focused on Grice's Cooperative Principle and the four maxims of quantity, quality, relevance and manner. The data was also examined for the violations or floutings of the maxims, the conversational implicature they gave rise to and the language play involved. These were also subject to analysis and discussion.

#### **5.1 The Research Focus**

The prime focus was on establishing to what extent the speakers conformed to the Cooperative Principle and adhered to the four maxims.

Then, violations of the maxims were identified in the data and an attempt was made to investigate and explain how these violations occurred. This included an examination of the cultural background of the participants in order to find out what influence it had on the participants' contributions. The findings from the questionnaire were taken into consideration for purposes of triangulation to see to what extent it confirmed the insights arrived at by means of the analysis of the audio recordings.

## **5.2 The Main Findings**

In general, the findings did reveal an adherence to the Cooperative Principle. The conversations generally flowed smoothly in all three settings (staff-room, school hall and school canteen). There were very few instances of miscommunication. Though there were a number of violations of the maxims, these did not represent a major obstacle in the conduct of the conversations. The conversational implicatures which the floutings gave rise to, resulted in underlying meanings that were different from the surface meanings of the utterances. The Cooperative Principle was maintained because the listeners were able to infer the underlying meaning from the context and the shared background knowledge.

### **5.2.1 Adherence to the Maxims**

Generally, the data did show an adherence to the maxims. Participants showed a co-operative effort thus generating successful communication. Attempts were made by speakers to maintain a smooth flow of conversation. This further reinforces that Grice's Cooperative Principle and the four maxims are real constructs.

### **5.2.2 Violation of the Maxims**

The findings from the data suggest that the maxim which was most frequently violated is the maxim of quantity. Superfluity, exaggeration and humour were striking features of the conversations. These features often led to the violation of the maxim of quantity. Although this maxim was frequently violated, these violations did not lead to miscommunication or a misunderstanding. In other words, they did not disrupt the flow of the conversations in any significant way. The speakers still continued with their conversations and no awkward pauses or breaks in the conversations occurred. This was probably due to the fact that the participants shared the same background knowledge. This enabled them to understand what was communicated.

The violations for the most part involved the speakers giving more information than was necessary in the course of conveying their ideas. This was done mainly to convince other speakers of their motives, to avoid confusion, as a mark of politeness and also to express disapproval in an indirect manner.

### **5.2.3 Language Play**

All the teachers in this study are qualified and trained teachers. They are graduates and have either a distinction or strong credit in English language at the S.P.M level. They displayed a high level of English proficiency.

In this scenario, their shared background knowledge appears to have facilitated communication enabling it to proceed smoothly. In addition, the shared professional background enabled the use of jargon in the conversation. Terms like 'Pengetua', 'our parents', 'PIBG' and 'HEM' were used quite often throughout the conversation. This was understood easily and did not impede the conversations in any way. This not only made the communication smooth but also natural and easy. These features also helped the listeners to interpret the meanings conveyed by speakers especially when there was exaggeration, sarcasm, and the use of literary devices such as personification, understatement and metaphor.

### 5.2.4 Cultural Aspects

Indirectness was a striking feature of the conversations and may be traced to the common Malaysian background of the participants. The manner in which people speak is generally influenced by their culture. And this appears to be the case with Malaysians too.

The rich Malaysian culture appears to have seeped into the way Malaysians conduct conversations. When faced with a confrontation, the speakers in the data attempted to defuse the situation by agreeing to the remarks, maintaining silence or latching on to the conversations.

There was no evidence of the participants withdrawing abruptly from a conversation. To withdraw abruptly would indicate outward displeasure or disrespect. This is not in keeping with the Malaysian culture where harmony is often maintained at all cost.

The findings from the data also indicate that often when a compliment is given, the recipient will try to deflect attention from himself by denying what is said or changing the subject. These in turn may to an extent influence the way one speaks or reacts in an interaction.

### 5.3 Implications and Recommendations

At present, although English is taught in all schools and its importance has been stressed, the focus is mainly on the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. There is also considerable emphasis on learning grammar rules and the acquisition of vocabulary.

The findings of this study suggest that it is very important to learn English beyond the literal level. It is essential to go beyond the surface meaning of utterances so as to ensure that students become truly proficient in understanding and using the English language especially in speaking.

With the introduction of literature in English in schools, teachers are given ample opportunities to ensure that students are truly able to comprehend and produce language. This means going beyond the surface or literal meaning of utterances. A knowledge of and understanding of Grice's maxims are likely to further enhance the ability to participate effectively in conversations. The maxims help an individual choose his words carefully in the interest of a more effective communication. The student is also likely to be better equipped with the appropriate inferential strategies to enable him to truly comprehend what the other participants in a conversation are saying.

Grice's Cooperative Principle and the four maxims provide a framework that enables speakers in a verbal interaction to give enough information, to be truthful, to be relevant and to be clear when communicating ideas.

The findings of this study suggest that, in an informal setting, the violation of the maxims did not impede communication in any significant way. Rather, though violations did occur, they did not interfere with the understanding of the speakers or impede the flow of the conversation. This is mainly because the conversation of teachers occurred in an informal setting. There was no specific goal, purpose or objective. So the resulting conversations were fluid and developed and had a spontaneous effect.

#### **5.4 Further Research**

Further research is needed on this area and is likely to be of interest to teachers, teacher trainers, curriculum planners and materials writers. As for the language learner, it is not sufficient to focus on the surface meaning especially in the learning of language. Understanding beyond the literal meaning of texts and conversations would help tremendously especially in the learning of a language.

Finding effective ways of preparing students for spontaneous communication seems to be one of the challenges faced by teachers. So knowledge in the area of pragmatics may greatly help in the designing of curriculum and syllabus for teachers and language planners for optimal results.

This study was mainly on conversations of teachers in an informal setting. It would be interesting to extend this study in a formal setting or to other professionals in a similar interactional setting.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Evidence in the data provides information that speakers generally conform to the Co-operative Principle. This proves that the Co-operative Principle as proposed by Grice is a real construct. Though the conversational maxims were violated, conversations continued smoothly between speakers. Indeed the framework as provided by Grice can be exploited by teachers and curriculum designers in the planning of lessons for students.