

CHAPTER 4

4.0 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This study is based on an EA framework. It is only confined to subordinating conjunctions because the majority of the errors of SL learners of the English Language seems to revolve around subordinating conjunctions. When the focus is on the learners and their developing language system, the given assignments (tests) may be viewed as elicitation procedures. The data elicited may then be analyzed and these scores may be treated as attempts to diagnose specific aspects of the learners' development. EA is significant, as it prescribes "therapeutic intervention" for the learner in terms of his learning. For the teacher, EA indicates what has to be taught and how it has to be taught. W.R. Lee (in Robinett & Schachter, 1983: 153) states that:

"...through an examination of learner's errors, a teacher may enter more fully into the environment of teaching and put on, as it were, his pupil's linguistic spectacles."

For the researcher, it constitutes an important input to SL learning theories. As Dulay, Burt & Krashen appropriately put it:

"...EA has helped to raise the status of errors from unwanted forms to relatively important status of indicators of learning and guides to teaching ... Together with transitional constructions, acquisition orders and other performance aspects, errors provide important insights into the process of SLA and instruction."

(1982: 197)

Indeed, the efficacy of EA is definitely hailed as a data elicitation process.

This study will be conducted by the researcher with the following considerations in mind. They are to:

(a) restrict herself to the study of one component of grammar in the English Language, i.e. subordinating conjunctions.

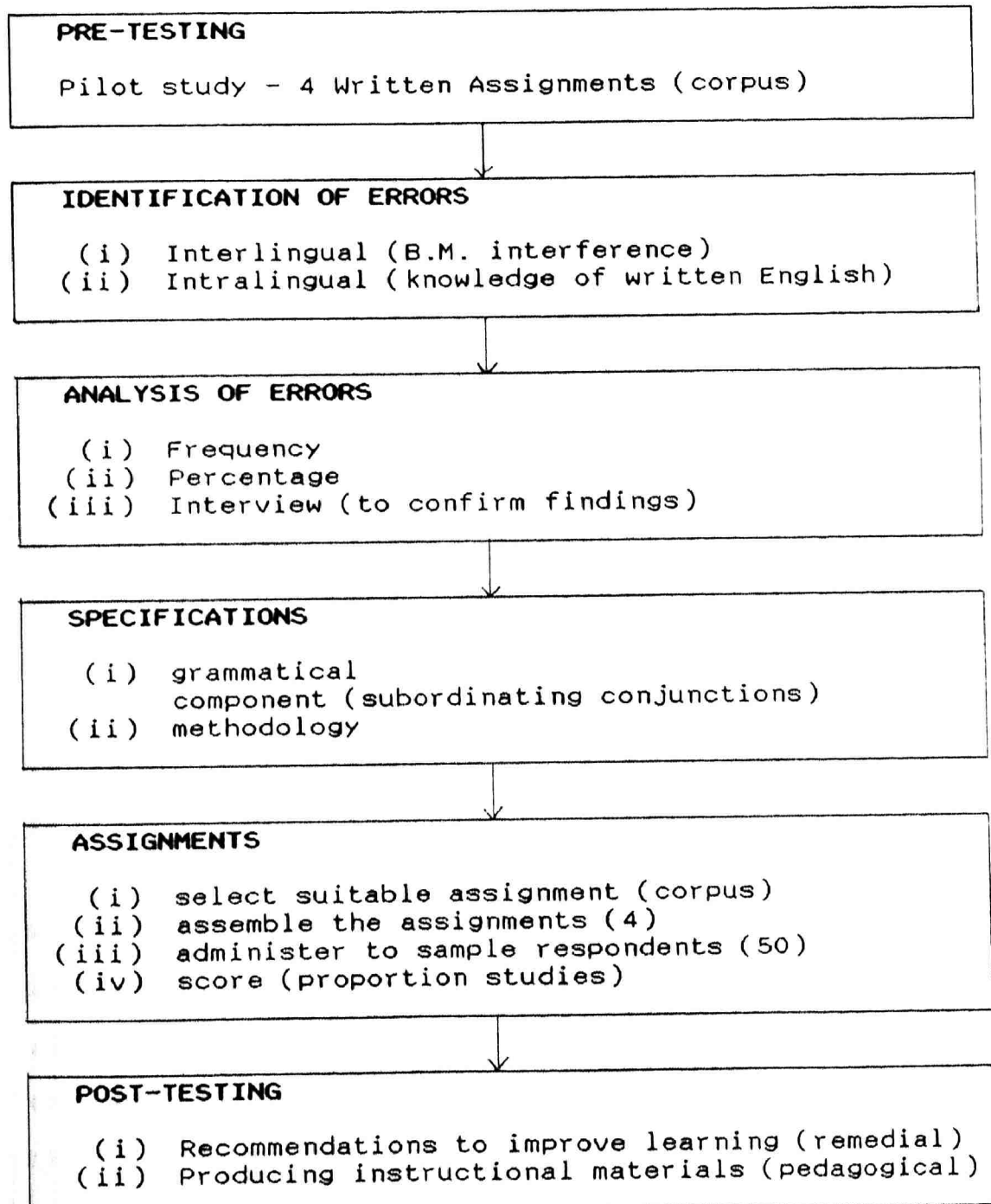
(b) take a small sample belonging to a homogeneous group in terms of race, age and level of education.

and (c) establish a hierarchy of difficulties in the use of subordinating conjunctions among Malay Students.

The main objective of this study is to determine and categorize the types of errors made in using subordinating conjunctions in the English Language by administering four different kinds of assignments to fifty secondary students from Form Four in Sekolah Menengah Dato Harun, Petaling Jaya. The use of subordinating conjunctions is examined in relation to their functions. The use of subordinating conjunctions is also examined in different syntactic structures. Patterns of frequent errors will be examined and their possible causes will be studied. The mode of investigation will be systematic and this is what is known as **Action Research**. Action Research is a **systematic attempt** made to gather relevant information to a problem with the view of finding a solution to it. The researcher has drawn up an Action Research Framework as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Action Research Framework For Data Collection



4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Sample Respondents

For the purpose of this investigation, the researcher selected fifty secondary students from Sekolah Menengah Taman Dato' Harun, Petaling Jaya. The subjects were selected from two Form Four classes taught by the researcher herself as they were easily accessible. Only Form Four students were selected because the researcher felt that Form Five students have to prepare for their public examination (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) at the end of the year and the administration of the questionnaire and assignments would mean unwelcomed disruption of school and class routine. The researcher also felt that fifty respondents was a realistic sampling as a small sample would be more effective for a detailed study to be done.

Furthermore, these respondents were ethnic Malays who were representative of the general proficiency level of all Form Four students in the school. For this purpose, the past P.M.R. (Penilaian Menengah Rendah) results of these respondents were referred to, to justify the sample. Having undergone the same educational system for almost ten years (i.e., six years in the primary level

and four years in the secondary level), the respondents would have learned the different types of subordinating conjunctions and their functions. This assumption is based on the English syllabi for primary and secondary schools. Furthermore, after scoring and evaluating the pilot study, the respondents were given instruction on the functions and use of subordinating conjunctions. The study also controlled the variable of age and both sexes were represented.

4.2.2 Test Instruments

Based on the findings of the pilot study (pre-testing) carried out by the researcher, the following four assignments were constructed (Please refer to Appendix G). Before giving these assignments to the subjects for this study, the researcher took the following steps:

- (i) studied the English textbooks from Forms One to Four.
- (ii) reviewed the English syllabi and Curriculum Specifications from Forms One to Four.

(iii) discussed with the supervisor, Dr. P. Balasubramaniam, the efficacy and validity of materials to be used for data elicitation.

(iv) discussed and tested these assignments on two English teachers from Sekolah Menengah Taman Dato' Harun and two lecturers from Institut Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam.

and (v) revised weak items and discarded non-functional items from these assignments.

All these steps (i.e., (i) to (v)) were taken to ensure that these assignments were prepared and designed to inform the researcher about the informants' progress towards the curriculum in terms of subordinating conjunctions and to ascertain the instructional value of these assignments i.e., how easily these assignments could be fitted into the educational programme of the class and ultimately, the school. These assignments were constructed by the researcher herself.

In this investigation, the researcher will seek answers to the following questions:

- (a) Do Form Four Malay students know the various kinds of subordinating conjunctions?
- (b) Do they understand the various lexical and semantic meaning and grammatical functions of these subordinating conjunctions?
- and (c) Can they use these subordinating conjunctions correctly in written English?

All these questions clearly indicate that the researcher will focus on the ability of Form Four ethnic Malay students in using subordinating conjunctions on the production level (i.e. writing).

Assignment One

The informants are asked to fill in the blanks with the correct subordinating conjunctions, according to the different types (categories). The aim of this task is to

ascertain whether they know how to use subordinating conjunctions correctly.

Assignment Two

The informants are instructed to select and circle the correct answer. This assignment is of the Multiple Choice Question variety. The researcher selected this mode of questioning (testing) because the Multiple Choice type of testing affords two principal advantages, namely ease of administration and objective scoring. Multiple Choice Questions also provide an extensive sampling of content (i.e. the use of subordinating conjunctions) due to the large number of questions that can be included. Furthermore, the complete structuring of the questions, limits the informants to the types of responses called for. The purpose of this test is to ascertain whether the informants know which correct subordinating conjunction to select.

Assignment Three

In this assignment, the informants are given a visual stimulus and a corresponding cloze passage. They are asked to fill in the blanks in the passage with the correct subordinating conjunctions (to be chosen from a

given box). The cloze procedure used here is the variable - ratio method (vs. fixed ratio method), as the words are deleted not according to a fixed counting procedure but according to the grammatical morphemes (i.e. subordinating conjunctions) that are to be tested. As Oller states:

"... cloze tests have the virtue of assessing points of grammatical knowledge in normal contexts of usage."

(1979: 362)

The aim of this assignment is to identify whether the subjects know how to use the given subordinating conjunctions in the correct context.

Assignment Four

The informants are asked to combine sentences with the correct subordinating conjunction. Such a task tests the ability of the informant to select the appropriate subordinating conjunction to combine short sentences into longer ones, in order to show the relationship (e.g., of time, reason, concession etc.) between the ideas in these short sentences.

Most of the assignments constructed for this study can be classified as **discrete point testing**, as they focus attention on one point of grammar at a time (i.e., subordinating conjunctions) and assess one skill at a time (i.e., writing) and one aspect of a skill (i.e., production). This meets Carroll's (1961) definition of 'discrete point testing'. These assignments also meet the requirements of pragmatic language tests as they require the subjects to:

(a) utilize contextual restraints

and (b) comprehend and produce meaningful elements in the language.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was presented in two languages, i.e., Bahasa Melayu and English, to ensure that failure to understand the instructions or questions would not affect the responses. (Please refer to Appendix H for the Questionnaire). The questionnaire covers the informants' background and exposure to English.

Altogether, there were fifteen questions. There were open-ended questions and also close-ended questions. For

the close-ended questions, the respondents had to tick the appropriate response.

The Interview

An interview with the respondents was held after the administration of the test instruments to clear doubts and confirm insights.

4.2.3 An Analysis Of The Test Instruments

The table below, Table 5 shows the question number of each subordinating conjunction tested in the four assignments. This will facilitate reference by the researcher or future researchers and allows for easy identification of the subordinating conjunctions, in the order they appear in the assignments.

Table 5

Classification Of Subordinating Conjunctions According
To The Question Numbers As They Appear
In The Given Assignments

Subordinating Conjunctions	Assignment							
	1		2		3		4	
	Question Number		Question Number		Question Number		Question Number	
When	1	3	12	36	10		5	14
Before	8	10	2	40	3		1	9
After	2	4	1	25	5		4	11
Since	6	12	3	17	8		-	-
While	5	7	4	27	7		15	17
Until	9	11	15	38	9		-	-
If	13	16	6	39	11		3	10
Unless	14	15	7	10	2		7	12
So As To	17	18	21	29	13		-	-
In Order That	19	20	32	37	18		6	13
Because	22	25	9	31	4		21	19
In Case	24	26	22	30	6		-	-
So That	21	23	8	19	17		-	-
Although	28	30	5	24	14		2	8
Despite	27	32	18	20	20		-	-
Not That	29	31	23	35	19		-	-
Where	33	35	14	28	12		18	20
Wherever	34	36	13	26	1		-	-
Like	38	40	16	33	16		-	-
As Though	37	39	11	34	15		16	22

The table below shows the frequency of various subordinating conjunctions tested in each assignment (see Table 6). The subordinating conjunctions "when", "before", "after", "while", "if", "unless", "in order that", "because", "although", "where", and "as though" appear seven times (i.e., 5.7 per cent) each, while the subordinating conjunctions "since", "until", "so as to", "in case", "so that", "despite", "not that", "wherever",

and "like" appear five times (i.e., 4.1 per cent) each. Cumulatively, these subordinating conjunctions appear one hundred and twenty two times in the four assignments.

Table 6

**The Frequency Of Subordinating Conjunctions Tested
In The Four Assignments**

No. Subordinating Conjunctions	No. Of Assignments				Total	Percentage
	1	2	3	4		
1 when	2	2	1	2	7	5.7
2 before	2	2	1	2	7	5.7
3 after	2	2	1	2	7	5.7
4 since	2	2	1	-	5	4.1
5 while	2	2	1	2	7	5.7
6 until	2	2	1	-	5	4.1
7 if	2	2	1	2	7	5.7
8 unless	2	2	1	2	7	5.7
9 so as to	2	2	1	-	5	4.1
10 in order that	2	2	1	2	7	5.7
11 because	2	2	1	2	7	5.7
12 in case	2	2	1	-	5	4.1
13 so that	2	2	1	-	5	4.1
14 although	2	2	1	2	7	5.7
15 despite	2	2	1	-	5	4.1
16 not that	2	2	1	-	5	4.1
17 where	2	2	1	2	7	5.7
18 wherever	2	2	1	-	5	4.1
19 like	2	2	1	-	5	4.1
20 as though	2	2	1	2	7	5.7
Total	40	40	20	22	122	100.0

Table 7 below shows the breakdown of the total one hundred and twenty one subordinating conjunctions tested according to their functions. Temporal Conjunctions constitute 31.1 per cent, Conditional Conjunctions 11.5 per cent, Conjunctions of Purpose 9.8 per cent,

Conjunctions of Reason and Result 13.9 per cent,
Concessive Conjunctions 13.9 per cent, Conjunctions of
Place 9.8 per cent and Conjunctions of Manner 9.8 per
cent of the subordinating conjunctions tested.

Table 7
Classification Of Subordinating Conjunctions Tested

No.	Types of Subordinating Conjunctions	No. Of Times (Frequency)	Total	Percentage
1	Temporal Conjunctions when before after since while until	7 7 7 5 7 5	38	31.1
2	Conditional Conjunctions if unless	7 7	14	11.5
3	Conjunctions of Purpose so as to in order that	5 7	12	9.8
4	Conjunctions of Reason and Result because in case so that	7 5 5	17	13.9
5	Concessive Conjunctions although despite not that	7 5 5	17	13.9
6	Conjunctions Of Place where wherever	7 5	12	9.8
7	Conjunctions of Manner like as though	5 7	12	9.8
	TOTAL	122	122	100.0

4.2.4 Administration Of The Test Instruments

Prior permission was obtained by the researcher from the principal of the school before the administration of the test instruments. The assignments were administered by the researcher herself. These assignments were conducted in the afternoons after school hours. The informants were students taught by the researcher herself and they were asked to fill in a questionnaire prior to the assignments. This questionnaire was given in the month of March.

The investigation using the assignments was conducted in the month of April at staggered intervals. No time limit was set as the researcher felt that responses to these assignments would be better validated if the informants were not under any kind of duress. They were also briefed about the aim of the study.

The informants were not allowed to bring in external aids like dictionaries, grammar guide books or notes. They were also strictly reminded not to talk to each other or copy one another during the duration of the testing. During the administration of these tests, the researcher walked around to ensure that the tests were carried out as planned without any interruptions.

At the end of each test, the scripts were collected by the researcher, followed by correction and analysis.