

## 2 METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 *The Subject*

A young ESL student, Sean, aged 18, who speaks English fluently formed the subject of the study. He very articulate and vocal and as been identified as a proficient ESL student on the basis of his Ujian Pernilaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR), Form 1 to 5 final year English exams, Pernilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR) and the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) where he obtained A grades and distinctions 1 consistently. He is currently at MBSKL in Upper Six in a Pure Science class and will be sitting for the STPM at the end of 1999. The study itself seeks to annotate the different processes which are involved in the act of composing a piece of text from the moment the child is asked to write to the final completion of that writing act.

### 3.2 *Background*

An interview based on the subject's background (Appendix 1) was done to build up the subject's profile. The subject, Sean loves writing and this explains his constant good grades in his class work. Sean also admitted he prefers writing in English as compared to Bahasa Melayu as he is more fluent in this language and feels very comfortable with the language. He also confessed that he usually prepares a draft before writing any tasks, be it in any languages as it gives him

greater confidence in elaborating his points. His ideas for writing are generally derived from his reading materials, the media and more recently, surfing through the Internet. Coming from a moderately English speaking family has built up his confidence with the language.

According to Sean, he finds writing easy when a topic related to his interest is given. He finds factual topics boring as there is a tendency for them to overlap with the Bahasa Melayu topics. He finds difficulty in writing when he is posed with a topic that he is not familiar with or has inadequate knowledge. This is the reason why he prefers narratives as they give room for creativity. Sean admitted spending very little time revising at the end of his writing process as he revises constantly as he writes. He is also always aware of his reader and most of his readers have been his language teachers. He believes that teachers mark their papers based on their impressions. As such, he stresses good language, inclusive of excellent grammar and spelling are the keys to good essay writing.

Sean also feels that the current syllabus in school does not prepare them for the actual working world and wants more challenging aspects of the language to be included in the current English Language curriculum. Sean who aspires to be a mechanical engineer when he completes his studies, finds the English language more important and useful as compared to the national language, the Bahasa Melayu.

## 2.3 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to access the subject's proficiency level and a few introductory sessions on think-alouds were carried out to familiarise the subject with the method. This was carried out to eliminate the fear of the think-aloud method. This is pertinent to ensure the subject feels comfortable with the method and the data obtained is of genuine in nature.

To gauge the level of the subject's proficiency in writing, he was given a written task entitled "Is racial integration possible in Malaysia? Give your views". He was asked to write an essay in about four hundred words. The University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate continuous writing mark scheme (Appendix 2) was used to assess the subject's proficiency level.

### 3.2.1 Findings

The following is an excerpt of the subject's writing (also refer to Appendix 3).

*...In the few mixed marriages that we see sometimes, one party has to virtually forsake all of his or her culture and beliefs in order to be accepted by the other party. So instead of integration of two races, or at least the assimilation of each other's cultural values, it is complete dropping of one's culture and beliefs to embrace completely the other's. So the races remain adamant about their positions and none is likely to concede anything for racial integration.*

From the above excerpt, it is evident that the language is entirely accurate and the sentence structure is varied. The usage of vocabulary is wide and is

used with precision. What is more important is that the topic was addressed with consistent relevance. The subject also succeeded in arousing and sustaining the interest of the reader. It is clearly evident that the subject is a proficient writer.

### ***3.3 Procedure***

The subject was given a few practice sessions to acquaint him with the think aloud procedure and he adapted to the technique quickly. On the appointed day the subject was assured that he could take as much time as needed to complete the writing task and was given the writing task and asked to think aloud while composing. Nevertheless, the subject was informed that an ideal time to complete the task was about 1 hour 45 minutes. The writing session was then audio taped. At the end of the writing session, all written materials including rough outlines, drafts, scraps and the final product were collected. An open ended interview (Appendix 4) followed to throw more light on the processes the subject was perceived to have gone through so as to derive a profile of him as a writer and also to ensure reliability.

### ***3.4 Writing Task***

Write an essay on one of the following topics in about 500 words. You are advised to spend about 1 hour and 45 minutes on this section.

1. "According to Vision 2020, an economically prosperous country cannot qualify to be fully developed nation unless we have also developed into a caring society." Discuss.

Or

2. "Technology is dramatically changing the way in which we live and work." Discuss.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

A modified version of Perl's (1979) coding scheme was used as a guide to identify the outstanding composing behaviours of Sean. As the focus was narrow, that is, to examine only the composing behaviours, time was considered secondary to the purpose of the study unlike Perl's study (1979) and the two studies conducted in Malaysia (Lee;1989, Lee; 1992) where the time for each behaviour was recorded. The subject's verbalisations which were audio taped , determined when the subject was talking, writing, doing both talking and writing and even pausing. The think aloud protocol and interview data transcripts were then triangulated to make sound inferences about the subject's composing behaviour.