

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter talks about the procedures and methodology undertaken by the researcher to collect data. The researcher, through audiorecordings and observation, examined Malay women's conversations to establish whether the features used were co-operative as the literature had suggested. In this study, two recordings were made and later transcribed. Finally, the data collected was analysed quantitatively and qualitatively.

3.2 PROCEDURES AND METHOD OF RESEARCH

There are two ways undertaken by the researcher to gather data for this study: audio recordings and observation. The data for this study was obtained from two recordings made by the researcher. The researcher decided to use audio recordings rather than video recordings. Audio recording, being less intrusive in nature, would enable more natural conversations to be recorded. The conversations were recorded on a SONY cassette player which had a sensitive built-in microphone and which worked well for recording and playback purposes. As the tape recorder was small in size, it could be placed anywhere without attracting any attention. The recordings were clear and of good quality and the researcher did not encounter any major problems during the recording or the transcription of the conversations. The researcher acted as an observer and not as an active participant in the interactions. The researcher also refrained from using an external microphone in order to create a more conducive atmosphere, and to make the subjects feel more at ease. This choice however, deprived the researcher the opportunity to discuss the conversation with the participants on the

spot. The researcher could only discuss later by asking the conversationalists to recall and reflect on specific parts of the dialogue to avoid any ambiguities. The participants were not informed that the conversations were to be recorded. They were informed about the recordings only when the conversation had ended. The recordings were played again so that the participants involved in that particular interaction could have the opportunity to listen and omit things that they felt to be private and confidential. Then, the consent of all the participants was obtained.

The recorded conversations were then transcribed by the researcher. The discussions were transcribed and coded using conventional transcription symbols. However, modifications were made where appropriate, following transcription standards suggested by Jennifer Coates (1996, 1998). A summary of transcription conventions is provided in Appendix A. The researcher decided to follow this transcription convention as it was simple and the most suitable for this study. The researcher decided not to include prosodic features of talk like intonation, rhythm and stress as the focus of the study is to identify features used to form co-operative talk. However, direct questions would use the question mark symbol, irrespective of the intonation. The timing between the pauses and symbols which indicate short pauses and long pauses were included. The headers of each transcription of this study include an introduction which gives details of the participants, the duration, and other relevant details of the conversation.

3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

The interactions were transcribed by the researcher. The transcription process proceeded quickly and efficiently despite having to play the tape a few times so as to enable the researcher to transcribe every word used by the participants. Moreover, the researcher decided to spell out words using the standard orthography wherever

possible. For words other than English used in the conversations as a result of code switching, they were transcribed phonetically. Then the data collected was analysed qualitatively by looking at the types of formal features of women's language (as in chapter 2) in an all-female Malay group. An attempt was also made to complement this qualitative analysis by means of quantitative measurements of the interaction, such as the number of features used by every participant in all the interactions as a whole.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION

3.4.1 SOURCE OF DATA

The data obtained for this study was taken from informal conversations or interactions among friends which were taped on two occasions. A tape recorder was used for taping. The recordings of these interactions were not planned. This means that the participants were taped while they were having informal conversations so that the conversations would be as natural as possible. The subjects were not told that they were being taped in order to encourage greater participation as well as to encourage them to articulate their thoughts in a more spontaneous manner. Later the participants were free to erase any recorded material that they considered inappropriate. Only a small part of the conversations had to be erased for fear that it would cause a controversy. Analysis of data will only be on parts of the conversations allowed by the conversationalists. Consent from the conversationalists was obtained and they had agreed to permit the use of the tape by the researcher.

3.4.2 ASPECTS OF INTERACTION

(a) Topic

No specific topic was given to the participants. The participants could touch on any topics so that the conversation would be authentic. Stubbs (1983) in

Jariah's (1999: 20) study, defined natural conversation as spontaneous, unplanned, relatively unpredictable and casual. It constitutes:

- 1) language which occurs naturally without any intervention from the linguist and
- 2) language which is spontaneous in the sense of being unplanned, and which is composed in real time in response to immediate demands.

(b) Duration

The duration of time for each conversation varied as it depended on the topic discussed. Generally, women enjoy talking about their personal lives with each other and they tend to get carried away at times. Some interactions might even go on for hours. Therefore, the researcher decided to tape two conversations which proved to be adequate for this study. The first conversation took about fifty-five minutes and the second was for about thirty-five minutes.

(c) Number of Participants

The number of participants in each conversation taped varied from five to six as the recordings were unplanned. All of them were female and of Malay ethnic background. The participants were close friends who had known each other for at least a year.

(d) Location

The interactions were taped during lunch breaks in a staff room. This place, regarded as the "routine setting" by Zimmerman & West (1975), was where everyday conversations took place even when others were likely to overhear the conversation.

(e) Language

English was used in the conversations. However, if there were any English-Malay code- switching, the English translation of the parts in Malay was provided in parentheses. Since all the women in this study were Muslims, there were also features of Arabic terms or expressions in their interactions.

3.5 PARTICIPANTS' BACKGROUND

All the subjects involved were graduates from local universities. They were aged between twenty four and thirty five. The participants were good friends who had known each other for at least a year. Therefore, they were comfortable while engaged in conversation with each other on any topic.

The subjects' background:

Subject	Programme	Area of specialization	University	Age	Home state
Y	B.ED.	TESL	UPM	35	KUALA LUMPUR
Z	B.HSC.	ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE	UIA	28	PERAK
A	B.ED.	TESL	UKM	28	JOHOR
M	B.ED.	TESL	UKM	26	PERAK
D	B.HSC.	ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE	UIA	25	KUALA LUMPUR
B	B.A.	ENGLISH	UPM	24	PERAK
L	B.A.	TESL	UM	29	KUALA LUMPUR
H	B.A.	ENGLISH	UKM	24	KEDAH

All the participants were middle class Malay women, between the ages of twenty four and thirty five. The researcher chose them because they knew each other well and this made the recording easier.