

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter attempts to give a better understanding of female discourse to answer the research questions posed by the researcher in Chapter 1. Based on the data analysed, there is strong evidence to suggest that the features that appear in the all Malay female conversations do promote the sense of co-operativeness. In general, it is possible to generalise this sense of co-operation in women's conversation is a norm among female speakers.

#### 5.2 FINDINGS

**Table 5.1**  
**The total number of features used in conversation 1 and conversation 2**

<b>Formal features of language</b>	<b>Total</b>
Minimal responses	339
Hedges	44
Simultaneous speech	7
Overlaps	73
Interruptions	20
Inclusive pronouns	86
Questions	307
The marker <i>kan</i>	36

In sum, the participants in this study were found to use minimal responses, hedges, simultaneous speeches, overlaps, interruptions, inclusive pronouns, questions and the marker 'kan' in both conversations. Based on the analysis, it was found that the most used feature of the female language by the Malay female speakers were minimal responses and questions.

The study undertaken by the researcher provided strong evidence that the devices used by the participants promoted co-operative talk. Co-operativeness here refers to participants working together in harmony and building on each other's contribution to produce a collaborative text. This style of interaction is based on solidarity and support. Hence, the Malay women in this study were more inclined to establish a conversation based on feminine solidarity and co-operativeness by using a mixture of strategies to demonstrate collaborative talk.

The analysis of the two conversations in this study demonstrates the wide range of topics, including topics of self-disclosure arising in friendly conversations among the Malay women. In like manner, the panelists in Jariah's (1999) study, especially the women, tended to see conversation as an opportunity to discuss personal issues and share personal experiences which involved mutual self-disclosure and stories that mirror each other. Thus, this increased solidarity among them. Similarly, the findings in this research also confirms Coates's (1996) claims that women's talk consists of topics about people and their personal experience. The Malay women also developed topics of conversation through stories, discussions and even a combination of both. Stories and discussions help build the conversation because women will join in the conversation and share their thoughts based on others' contribution. It is evident from the conversations that narrations and discussions were crucial components in women's discourse as they enabled speakers to express themselves easily. By offering

to share their personal experiences with the rest of the group, the conversationalists were actually showing their support and encouraging the participation of others.

The researcher studied the use of minimal responses like 'mmhm', 'yeah' and 'uh-huh' in the study of spontaneous talk of a group of Malay women. Based on the data collected, there were 243 minimal responses found in conversation 1 and 96 in conversation 2. Coates (1998) said that the women in her study used minimal responses to indicate that the listener was listening attentively and thus indicated active participation. Jariah (1999) also mentioned that minimal responses was a form of feedback and that minimal responses like 'ya', 'o.k' and 'yes' were used to show confirmation, acknowledgement and agreement of the topics discussed. Jariah(1999) further added that minimal responses helped facilitate the panelists in her study to continue the conversation and to indicate that the speakers were being attentive and interested in the talk. Both Jariah(1999) and Coates (1996) believed that laughter was important in women talk. Laughter played a major role in the Malay female speakers' conversations. Coates (1996) said that laughter signalled the participants' involvement in the conversation without having to produce an utterance. Likewise, Jariah (1999) said that laughter in a conversation indicated an informal situation. The nature of the conversation in this study was pleasant with no confrontation from members of the floor. It also indicated that the speakers were relaxed and enjoyed each other's company. Similarly, there is evidence that the women in this study also used minimal responses, both verbal and non-verbal, to carry out a range of functions which fully supported Coates (1998) claims. The conversationalists in this study used a lot of 'mmm', 'uh-huh', 'ya', 'yes' and 'yeah' to respond to the other's utterances. The Malay women in this study used minimal responses to show attention and interest which facilitated the subjects to continue the discourse and to express approval, or to show agreement which is similar to Coates's and Jariah's findings. Laughter in this study

was taken as a form of non-verbal feedback i.e. to signal that the speakers were present and involved. These women needed to show that they were still participating even when they were not producing any utterances. The researcher felt that laughter was used to soften the tone of the conversation into an informal and friendly note. Furthermore, laughter turned the mood of the conversation into a pleasant and non-confrontational milieu as speakers touched on personal or sensitive issues that might invoke anger and dissatisfaction.

Coates (1998) concluded that epistemic modality was a significant feature of women's talk. According to her, the primary function of epistemic modality was to show that the speaker is not committed to what he or she is saying, to allow the speakers to be sensitive to others' feelings, and as means of avoiding expert status. The women in this study also used hedges or epistemic modality to avoid being the expert. Therefore, hedges were used to reduce power and status difference between the members of the female group. In other words, they were being humble. Furthermore, the hedges used by the speakers showed their lack of confidence in the topics discussed. It also showed that the speakers were unsure and did not want to be committed to what they had said. 'You know', for example, was used as a tool that showed shared knowledge between speaker and hearer, to engage mutual involvement in conversation, and to assist in the joint production of talk. The use of hedges is crucial in women's talk because they often discuss sensitive topics and practice self-disclosure. Therefore, to remain safe they used hedges. Most of the hedges found in this study were mainly used to reflect the speakers' uncertainty, the sharing of knowledge among friends, and to downplay authority as the expert to avoid social distance. The female conversations in this study were not hierarchical in structure as Jariah's because they did not have to play the part of experts in imparting knowledge.



Therefore, the conversationalists placed greater value in maintaining a collaborative floor.

Studies of the turn-taking system by Sacks et al. (1974), claimed that in order for a conversation to run smoothly, conversationalists must adhere to the rule of one speaker at a time. Nonetheless, in Coates' (1998) study, the participation of more than one speaker was important in women's conversations since women's interaction was basically a collaborative effort. Similarly, overlaps were not seen as a way to get the floor by the listeners. Overlaps did not threaten comprehension but permitted the development of the topic being discussed. Jariah (1999) said that overlaps and interruptions were not to be taken negatively as they helped to build up information in a conversation. The female panelists in her study overlapped and interrupted one another happily and worked together to establish a co-operative talk. Women friends in this study combined as speakers so that two or more voices contributed to the talk simultaneously. Examples of these contributions in the talk found in this study are simultaneous speeches, overlaps, latching and interruptions. As can be seen, the one-person-at-a-time did not apply to the Malay women's conversation. Similar to Jariah's 1999 findings, simultaneous speech, overlaps, and latching found in this study signalled the participants' active listenership and their eagerness to contribute to the production of the text. Interruptions, on the other hand, were violations of the rules of turn-taking as the interrupter prevents the speaker from finishing their turn. However, women generally intend the opposite with interruptions. Women exercise their rights to interrupt when they want to facilitate the conversation. Therefore, the Malay ladies in this study and Jariah's female panelists shared one thing in common, that is, they interrupted each other as a means of support and encouragement. In this study, an interruption became successful because there were some hesitation on the part of the current speaker, and the other speaker grabbed the opportunity to seize the floor.

Another reason was the current speaker could not finish her utterance while the other speaker moved on. The only reason for an unsuccessful interruption was the current speaker refused to give up her turn and continued the flow of her speech without surrendering to the interruptor.

Another common feature discovered by the researcher was the use of latches. Both Jariah and Coates concurred that latching was a prevalent feature used among the female speakers in their studies. According to them, latching or completing others' utterances was a gesture of support to the other speakers as well as a means of developing the topic of conversation. In like manner, latching (both verbal and non-verbal) in this study was frequently used by the participants. Contributions made by the speakers at the end of each utterance showed that they were monitoring each other's speech closely. The idea of sharing and co-operating in producing utterances helped to construct a collaborative talk, and did not become intrusive in nature.

These conversation patterns i.e. simultaneous speech, overlaps, latching and interruptions are not weak. They were mainly used by the Malay women in this particular group in their discourse as a co-operative strategy to maintain good social relationship among friends, and to show support and encouragement to the speakers.

Hirshman (1973) mentioned that women used a lot of inclusive pronouns like 'we' and 'us' more than exclusive pronouns like 'I', 'me' and 'you' to stress the importance of cohesiveness in a group. In this study, the pronouns we and us were also seen frequently in the Malay women's speech. The use of inclusive pronouns in this study was used to emphasise the existence of the other speakers. The subjects felt the need to emphasise on collectivism rather than individualism. By doing so, a particular speaker made the others feel involved in the conversation. Hence, by using inclusive pronouns, the speakers did not create social distance among themselves. In fact, they succeeded to gain approval and support from the rest of the members of the group.

Coates (1996) says that questions play a vital role in women relationships. Questions are used to demand responses and facilitate interaction among conversationalists. In the study, the researcher found a number of 201 questions in conversation 1 and 106 questions in conversation 2. Therefore, questions were an important aspect in generating talk among the Malay group in this research. As can be seen, the researcher found that the questions used by the Malay women in this study were mainly talk questions which consisted of a line of questioning which solicited information about the current conversation. Talk questions were the most frequently used because it gave the speakers opportunities to confirm and verify others' utterances or to clarify what others had said. This type of questioning solicits information about the on going conversation. Furthermore, it showed that the participants were actually good and active listeners. Coates (1996) said that info-seeking questions did occur in women's talk but play a minor role in the maintenance of women's friendly conversation if compared to other uses of questions. Similarly, the researcher found that the number of external questions i.e. questions which sought factual information about the world or about the lives of the speakers, was small compared to other uses of questions. In conversation 1 there were 42 external questions and in conversation 2 there were 26 external questions. So, based on the evidence, it can be concluded that the Malay female group did not favour information-seeking questions. The participants used talk questions to invite a particular speaker to speak. It was one way of giving the floor to another person. This was because the primary goal of the conversations was to maintain and develop friendship.

Apart from that, the conversationalists also used tag questions. Lakoff (1975) said that tag questions were used by women to express tentativeness and unassertiveness, while Coates (1996) stated that tag questions were used to invite others and draw them into the conversation. Facilitative tags were frequently used in

the speech of the British women she recorded. These tags encouraged others to comment and contribute. In this research, the researcher discovered that the group of Malay women also used the marker 'kan', as suggested by Wouk, as tag questions. The functions of tag questions in his study are similar to those of Lakoff and Coates. The researcher discovered that tag questions were mainly used by the group of the Malay women to verify matters and to claim confirmation. Therefore, the tag questions in this study were speaker oriented and not addressee oriented as claimed by Holmes (1984). However, 'kan' could be used as a tool to achieve solidarity in the conversations as it did facilitate the other speakers to participate in the talk. These tags could be seen as conversational prompts that simply provided some space for the addressee to come into the discourse. The participants in this study wanted to avoid talking like experts and they wanted others to join in and offer their views as well. At the same time, tag questions were used to extend the topic under discussion, as speakers used tags to develop the topics through the contribution of other members of the group. The other function of the kan marker in this study was that it acted as conjoint knowledge. Kan here was used to draw the addressee's attention to the knowledge of information shared by the speaker.

In conclusion, the combination of such features leads to a distinctive style of co-operative talk in which the joint activity of a group takes precedence over individual assertions. Thus, the findings in this study confirms Coates (1998) findings that women's conversation do promote the sense of co-operativeness among the conversationalists and there is no hierarchical structure in a group of friends engaged in informal conversations. However, in a formal context like in Jariah's study, the female conversations were hierarchical in nature. The speakers in Jariah's study needed to show to the viewers that they were knowledgeable and more powerful than the others. But they still used features such as back channel support and overlapping speech to

build harmonious and co-operative conversations to achieve solidarity. Therefore, this style of co-operative talk is an important characteristic of women when interacting verbally with one another.

### **5.3 IMPLICATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The implication for this study is essential as it is a new field of discourse. The researcher has come up with a number of implications for this study and that are listed as follows:

- 1) The object of this study should not only be confined to verbal interaction but also to non-verbal behaviour as well, such as raising the eyebrows, a headnod, or a headshake.
- 2) Researchers should also examine the role of intonation or prosodic features like syntax, grammar and lexis in an interaction.
- 3) This study should also include other professional groups such as businesswomen, doctors and lawyers as subjects with a similar interactional setting (informal) or a more formal one.
- 4) A study should also be carried out on women from different age, ethnic or race groups, as well as of different status.
- 5) Researchers could also do a more in-depth research on each of the formal features of language found in female interactions in both intragender and intergender conversations. Such research will provide a deeper understanding of the specific functions served by these features. This is because understanding of the different rules of communication and strategies used by the different sexes may in turn reduce misunderstanding.

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

This study has set out to demonstrate that women's linguistic features as discussed in the context of women-to-women interaction, can be used as a powerful tool of showing support and co-operation. However, this study cannot be regarded as disclosing general attributes of female discourse as the number of conversations analysed and the sample group is very small. Even so, the data gathered suggested that the features found in the all Malay female group shared similar features found in other women related studies.

In conclusion, there is a great deal still to be done in the area of female discourse. Therefore, it is hoped that this study has contributed to the existing pool of knowledge in the field of female discourse, especially in Malaysia, and become a useful reference point for other researchers to conduct similar studies in the future.