CHAPTER 5

THE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 The background

This study has examined the language used by Malaysian speakers of English in a recorded radio chat programme. An attempt has been made to examine the verbal interactions of participants in conversations using audio-recordings as the principal source of data. The focus is on informal spoken discourse and the aim was to identify and analyse conversational implicatures in the utterances of the deejays and the callers. The data collected was analysed using the Gricean framework. Particular attention was paid to Grice's Cooperative Principle and the four conversational maxims; the violations of the maxims and the strategies employed by the speakers within the violations of the maxims. The study also showed that the Cooperative Principle and the Politeness Principle interacted at times when conversational implicatures are conveyed.

5.2 The research focus

The study focused on the conversational implicatures in informal spoken discourse. Specifically, this study attempted to investigate how implied meanings were conveyed by speakers in specific contexts. The data collected was first examined to see how far speakers conformed to the Cooperative Principle and to what extent the maxims were adhered to in the interactions. Then, an

attempt was made to identify the violations of the maxims and to ascertain the rhetorical strategies that were employed in the violations. Next, the researcher attempted to classify the maxim violations in order to investigate how and why the maxims were violated. Finally, the implied meanings were interpreted based on the context of the conversational situation and the shared background knowledge of the participants. To confirm and establish the interpretation of implied meanings, the researcher paid attention not only to the responses of the participants in the programme but also to the responses of other uninvolved listeners of the programme.

5.3 The main findings

5.3.1 The Cooperative Principle

There was considerable evidence in the data to suggest that participants in the interactions generally conformed to the Cooperative Principle. This adherence applied to both the explicit meanings and the implicit meanings that the speakers conveyed. This indicates that Grice's Cooperative Principle and its four conversational maxims are real constructs. The participants in their roles as speakers and listeners attempted to preserve the cooperative effort between them and conversations generally proceeded successfully, even when the conversational maxims were overtly violated.

5.3.2 Maxim violations and the strategies involved

The findings in the data show that when conversational implicatures were established, the maxims of quantity, quality, relation and manner were violated. The findings also show that the rhetorical strategies of overstatement, understatement, obvious exaggeration, irony, metaphor, punch lines, ambiguous expressions and hedges were present within the violations of the conversational maxims.

The most striking violation is the maxim of quantity. This violation often resulted in speakers overstating, understating or exaggerating matters. In many instances, the speakers employed the use of more words than was necessary, to convey the implicature. The speaker's aim was to be less direct in matters that concerned controversial issues. The speakers displayed the tendency to uphold and maintain solidarity between participants, to defuse tension and avoid confrontation as a result of conflicting views; and as a mark of politeness, humility and deference.

The next outstanding violation is that of the maxim of manner. Participants in the conversations have the tendency to employ the use of exaggeration, metaphors and ambiguous expressions. By doing this, the participants portray their artful and strategic use of words in order to convey the underlying meanings. Often, this creates humour and listeners are pleasantly entertained.

The violation of the maxim of quality is also quite outstanding. Participants employ the use of exaggeration and hedges. These

rhetorical strategies appear to be useful strategies for avoiding embarrassing and unpleasant issues. They are also useful as face-saving strategies and help participants to carry on with the conversation without feeling uncomfortable with the issues at hand.

Finally, participants violate the maxim of relation with the use of such rhetorical strategies as irony, punch lines and exaggeration. The ironic expressions often invite the reactions of the listeners to matters that are sensitive. Messages that are more serious are insinuated or hinted at with the use of ironic expressions. This causes the listeners to think more deeply about the issues discussed. In such instances too, the speakers had the tendency to be sarcastic and cynical.

5.3.3 Indirectness

The high incidence of maxim violation suggests that indirectness is common among Malaysian speakers. Meanings are conveyed implicitly rather than explicitly on many occasions. These implicit meanings not only adhered to the Cooperative Principe but also to the Politeness Principle. Speakers tended to convey their meanings implicitly when it was not appropriate or advisable for them to be direct. This normally involves controversial issues.

The striking evidence of the violation of the maxim of quantity is an indication that participants in a conversation often chose to be very subtle, polite and diplomatic. Speakers also had the tendency to be ambiguous, to hedge and to speak metaphorically because the

situations did not permit them to be direct. The data also provides evidence of speakers often violating a maxim 'quietly and unostentatiously' with an intent to mislead. This was done, perhaps, again because the topics were serious and controversial; and the speakers found difficulty in adhering to the maxim. This finding suggests that the tendency to be indirect in some matters is a conversational style which many Malaysians adopt.

5.3.4 Culture and Custom

The influence of the culture and customs of Malaysians was evident throughout the data. The analysis of the data suggests that there appears to be a keen concern for face-saving and overt deference to superiors and elders in the informal discourse of many Malaysians. Speakers displayed good upbringing when they showed respect for the culture and customs of the country. The data also provided no evidence of speakers withdrawing from an interaction. This is not surprising because to withdraw from an interaction may reflect that one is being disrespectful, almost to the point of rudeness. When the speakers were faced with a clash of maxims, they also did not withdraw from the interaction because it was not in keeping with the cultural norms of the society.

5.3.5 The Proficiency of speakers

The spoken discourse of the deejays and the callers may be said to reflect the general proficiency of Malaysian ESL speakers. They may be classified as competent speakers of the English Language because they appear to be able to use appropriate rhetorical strategies to convey implied meanings successfully. The meanings were successfully conveyed and interpreted, indicating that the utterances produced by the speakers were intelligible and comprehensible. The fact that the listeners were able to interpret the meanings conveyed by the speakers shows that both the speakers and the listeners have a good command of the language for communication purposes.

5.3.6 The Creative Use of Language

Apart from the proficiency of the participants of the conversation, the deejays, in particular, displayed a creative and artful use of the language. This creativity and originality of thought and language were manifested in the use of the rhetorical strategies such as overstatements, understatements, obvious exaggeration, irony, metaphor, punch lines, hedges and ambiguous expressions. The participants were natural in their speech and were confident and at ease in the interactions. The deejays flouted the maxims blatantly and more frequently than the other participants did. In doing so, humour was created in many of the instances in this

study. The deejays also cajoled, teased, mocked, code-switched and insinuated on many occasions.

5.3.7 Language and Power

The deejays in this radio programme appear to wield immense social power. This is evident in their conversations. The deejays played a dominant role throughout the programme. They were in control of the line of conversation. They initiated the topics of discussion and they also put an end to it by providing appropriate comments.

5.4 Implications and recommendations

This study has provided evidence that conversational implicatures are prevalent in informal spoken discourse. Teachers can help students go from explicit conventional meanings to implicit meanings and sensitize these students to the importance of context and background knowledge, in conveying meaning.

This study shows that it is not enough for the language learner to focus on the surface meaning of utterances. They need to be aware of how underlying meaning may be conveyed and interpreted in specific contexts. This also calls for a knowledge of and the ability to use specific rhetorical strategies to convey underlying meanings and to make appropriate inferences in specific contexts.

For the language planner, this is another feature to consider when preparing the curriculum. Conversational implicatures cannot be ignored in planning a language programme because conversational implicatures are present in the informal spoken discourse of ordinary people. This study has focused on informal spoken discourse. The analysis and findings provide a basis for further research on conversational implicature using data from other sources. Future researchers may want to examine conversational implicatures in other types of discourse such as in spoken discourse or written discourse, both formal and informal. It would be interesting to see if the patterns of interactions found in this study appear in other types of discourse.

This study has also limited its investigation to the radio chat programme only. Studies can also be done on formal radio or television programmes as well. Investigations may also be carried out in other fields such as business, education, literature or science.