

# CHAPTER 3

## METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the methodology used to obtain data for the present study. 2 types of instrumentation were used; a set of questionnaires and oral communication activities. A brief introduction of the subjects is also included.

### 3.2 Instrumentation

Data for this study were derived from (1) results of questionnaires (see Appendix A) distributed to 165 students, with a 70% response rate (115/165); (2) transcripts from audio and video recorded utterances of 30 students. These students were from the same group of 165 students mentioned above. The students were paired (15 pairs) and given 3 tasks each. The tasks are (i) interview (Raupach, 1983) by the researcher with their partner present; (ii) picture description (Bialystok and Frochlich, 1980; Varadi, 1980), and picture reconstruction task (by drawing) (Bialystok, 1983; Varadi, 1980); (iii) conversation (Haastrup and Phillipson 1983) task with a given scenario.

Although the students were given a time frame of about an hour to complete all 3 tasks for each pair, they were not assigned any specific time frame for each task.

The tasks were selected specifically to observe (1) how much would learners voluntarily provide information about themselves? (2) how learners describe complex or culture specific details and pose questions to complete a certain task? (3) how learners argue and voice out their opinions on a specific topic; with their linguistic inadequacies in the target language.

It is hoped that these tasks would help provide answers to the research questions of this study.

There have been numerous studies conducted on NS-NNS interactions, while studies on NNS-NNS interactions are rather few. In NS-NNS interactions, more often than not, the NS controls the communication by taking over most of the verbalization through questions and providing alternatives, leaving the NNS to produce either positive or negative feedbacks only. These kinds of interactions provide observations on more of the NS's foreigner talk, rather than the NNS's interlanguage (IL) and CS (Wagner 1983). The researcher thus, chooses to look at data provided solely from NNS-NNS in this study.

### 3.3 The Subjects

Subjects were 30 students (16 female and 14 male) aged between 19 to 22 years. The students were studying in their second year of a 2 year Special Preparatory Program for Entry into Japanese Universities (RPKJ), before pursuing their undergraduate studies in universities in Japan, mainly in the fields of Engineering, Science and Technology. They study Japanese language, Japanese affairs, physics, chemistry, mathematics and English. In the first year, all the sciences and mathematics subjects are taught in Bahasa Malaysia.

In the second year all the courses are taught in Japanese except for English. By the end of the program they will be taught a total of 1000 hours of Japanese language.

The subjects were selected to ensure homogeneity in racial, cultural, religious belief and most importantly, their mother tongue or first language (L1) which is the Malay language or Bahasa Malaysia (BM). Their second language (L2) is English, as English is taught in Malaysia as a second language, while Japanese is learnt as a foreign language (FL).

All the students had been studying Japanese between 1 and 5 years and had received between 640 and 800 hours of formal Japanese language education, except for one student who spent 3 years of her elementary education in Japan on top of the lessons she received in the RPKJ program. All of the students have also obtained Level 3 of the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) conducted by The Japan Foundation. There are 4 levels for this test; Level 4 being the lowest or elementary level, and Level 1 being the highest and advanced level. Entrance to the Japanese universities requires a pass in Level 1 in this test, or its' equivalent. The JLPT is considered as the Japanese equivalent of TOEFL and is recognized worldwide.

To obtain interaction results from the different levels of proficiency, the students were paired into 15 pairs; 5 high proficiency pairs, 5 high and low mixed proficiency pairs and 5 low proficiency pairs. Their proficiency level is determined by their recent Japanese language exam results. In the Japanese language exam, students are tested on their grammar, listening and reading comprehension. Results for the composition and oral test are not included in the overall marks. Students categorized as the high

proficiency group are students who obtained more than 85 marks in the exam, while students who obtained 69 marks and below are categorized as the low proficiency group. Since the students' Japanese language teacher would be more familiar with the student's proficiency, one of them helped the researcher in the selection and pairing of the students. Table 3.1 presents a summary of the subjects according to the 3 proficiency pairs and the subject codes.

*Table 3.1 Subject Codes*

Proficiency Pairs	Subject 1	Subject 2
Hi-Hi 1	<b>HH1</b>	<b>HH2</b>
Hi-Hi 2	<b>HH3</b>	<b>HH4</b>
Hi-Hi 3	<b>HH5</b>	<b>HH6</b>
Hi-Hi 4	<b>HH7</b>	<b>HH8</b>
Hi-Hi 5	<b>HH9</b>	<b>HH10</b>
Hi-Lo 1	<b>HL1</b>	HL2
Hi-Lo 2	<b>HL3</b>	HL4
Hi-Lo 3	<b>HL5</b>	HL6
Hi-Lo 4	<b>HL7</b>	HL8
Hi-Lo 5	<b>HL9</b>	HL10
Lo-Lo 1	LL1	LL2
Lo-Lo 2	LL3	LL4
Lo-Lo 3	LL5	LL6
Lo-Lo 4	LL7	LL8
Lo-Lo 5	LL9	LL10

\* High proficiency learners are in bold

The students were aware that their utterances were going to be recorded. The researcher made sure that they were informed regarding the recordings at the beginning of the sessions. They were also informed about the recordings when they were asked to participate in the activities by their Japanese language teacher. In general, most of the students expressed their appreciation for being selected for the activities and they hoped that similar activities would be implemented as classroom activities as they had enjoyed

them. This was particularly so with most of the subjects in the high-high proficiency pairs and in the high-low proficiency pairs. Some of the subjects in the low-low proficiency pairs also found the activities fun and useful for their conversation practice.

### **3.4 Data Collection Method**

Questionnaires were distributed to 165 students with help from their Japanese language teacher. 115 responded by the end of the 2 weeks time frame stipulated to them. The response rate was 70%. Data for the communication activities were collected using 3 different tasks. The communication activities were audio and video recorded. The audio recordings were done using an audio tape recorder while the video recordings were done using a home video camera. The recordings were then listened to (audio recordings), viewed (video recordings) and transcribed. Transcripts of the utterances are the main source of analysis for this study. The data transcription method will be discussed under Data Transcription (see 3.5).

#### **3.4.1 Communication Task 1 – Interview by the Researcher**

At the beginning of the recordings, students were first interviewed by the researcher. This task serves as an ‘ice-breaking’ device for the students and the researcher to get to know one another. All the students were asked a set of standard questions in the presence of their partner. The reason for having their partner present was to observe if any kind of appeal for assistance from the student or any initiative from the partner to help without any appeal for help, were present or not, during the course of the interview.

The questions asked were:-

- Their name.
- Their hometown or state of origin.
- Their last secondary school.
- Their Japanese education background.
- Their reason to study in Japan.
- Their interest(s).
- Their future plans upon completing their studies in Japan.

As mentioned earlier, this task was selected to investigate how much of voluntary information would learners provide about themselves. In other words, despite their linguistic inadequacies, would they say more than what was being asked? Also, would they ask the interviewer questions in return? If any of these are present, is it due to their proficiency level?

### **3.4.2 Communication Task 2 - Picture Description and Picture Reconstruction**

This task was conducted in collaboration with the picture reconstruction task by drawing. One subject described a picture and the partner drew a picture based on that description. Participants then swapped roles and did the same task using different pictures. 10 photos (see Appendix B) of either Malaysian culture specific characteristics or difficult-to-explain complex details were selected. Two photos were selected at random for each pair. This task was selected to help generate situations where learners have to describe and try to understand descriptions of certain culture specific or complex details.

For the picture description task, subjects were instructed to describe to their partner the main characteristics of the photo. They were given instruction to help in any way possible in drawing the picture without showing the photo to their partners.

For the picture reconstruction task, subjects were asked to draw a picture based on descriptions given by their partners. They were instructed to draw the main characteristics of the picture only; therefore the drawing need not be nice, as long as it fit the descriptions given by their partners. They were allowed to do whatever they thought necessary in completing the drawings.

### **3.4.3 Communication Task 3 – Conversation**

In this oral activity, each pair was given a scenario to start off their conversation. 5 scenarios (see appendix 3) were created for this task and were picked randomly for each pair. The scenarios were created to investigate subjects' skills in arguments, expressing opinions, giving directions and advice in Japanese.

The Instructions given to the subjects were written in Bahasa Malaysia (L1), to make sure that the words they would use in the conversation were of their own original production, instead of copying those used in the instruction. Rocky (1998) states that instructions in her study were given in L1 as it would serve as a “suitable elicitation method of the learners' interlanguage (IL) and use of CS”. (see Appendix C for instructions on Task 2 and 3)

### 3.5 Data Transcription

Data was transcribed in the following manner:-

1. The video recordings were viewed once, to observe the flow of each segment, pair by pair. This is to ensure the sequence of turn-taking, especially for pairs where both subjects are of the same sex, so as not to confuse the speakers.
2. The audio recordings were used as the primary source of reference for data transcription due to their higher clarity of sound as compared to the video recordings. Audio recordings were transcribed and significant details related to the study were noted in the transcripts.
3. The video recordings were then viewed again for confirmation and to observe and note on any presence of non-linguistic strategies to be added into the transcripts.

The transcription symbols (see List of Transcription Symbols) used in the transcripts were adopted with modifications from the researcher's notes and from other transcription symbols commonly used in previous studies on CS and pragmatics. The modifications were necessary for clarity of the transcripts, as the transcripts were taken using a mixture of Japanese writing and Roman alphabets to preserve the subjects' actual utterances.



### 3.6 CS Identification Criteria

CS identification criteria was based on the following, taken from Ang (1992) with some modifications. Ang adapted the following criteria based on suggested criteria by leading researchers.

- 1) Existence of communication disruptions or awkwardness, such as when subjects stop talking to think/silence (long or short pause)/ lengthening of vowels/broken sentences/repetition/ self-repair.
- 2) Subject speaks in Japanese with sentence structures or word formations that are distinctively not Japanese.
- 3) Subject shows effort in trying other ways such as rephrasing a sentence, explaining/describing/appeal for help and so forth, in order for his intended meaning to be understood by his interlocutor.
- 4) Subject uses non-verbal expressions, such as body language or paralinguistic features either accompanying or replacing his utterances, in order to cover his linguistic inadequacies.
- 5) Subject shows effort in keeping the conversation going.

CS were identified using the above criteria and were classified based on taxonomies provided by Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurell (1995); Dornyei and Scott, 1997; Tarone, 1977; Paribakht, 1985) with some modifications.

### 3.7 Conclusion

The subjects gave full cooperation to the researcher in making the recordings possible, and thus provided the researcher with very rich and useful data. Although there were some inaudible segments throughout the recordings, the bulk of the recordings were quite clear. The video recordings served well as the secondary source of data as it provided details that could not be captured on audio recordings, such as the non-verbal or paralinguistic features of the interactions.

The present study does not include the introspective comments from the subjects; therefore it is difficult to determine the psychological aspect of CS usage in this data. Data analysis for this study is conducted solely in the interactional perspective and comments made are based on the assumptions of the author.