CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND TOOLS OF INQUIRY

A qualitative research adopting the needs analysis procedure appears to be more appropriate for describing the social context of this research which examines English Language needs, mainly dyadic speech interaction (who says what to whom and when). As this study is qualitative, descriptive and exploratory in nature there will not be any reference to quantitative measures or statistical tools. In a research of this nature, which involves a large state-of-the art organisation and where the phenomena is studied within a natural context, data are often collected by means of a number of procedures used simultaneously adhering to the tenets of ask, observe and collect (though not necessarily in that order).

3.1. Research Design

The research design is divided into two stages. The first stage involved gaining entry into the organisation. The second stage involved gaining the trust and acceptance of the informants. The latter stage was accomplished in an easier manner because the researcher was familiar with some of the front line staff members.

In order to carry out the needs analysis, access was first sought. It was at this stage that the researcher started to negotiate entry into the discourse community. The negotiation began with the researcher writing formally to the Human Resource Department (HRD). The researcher's written request to conduct a study to determine the language needs of
these staff members was first rejected by the Manager of the Training and Development Department (T&D) which is part of the HRD. The researcher had to then make a personal request to the Director of the MC to grant her an appointment so that she can explain the nature of her study. The Director and the Manager of T&D Department had to be convinced that the findings of the research would benefit the organisation. They also had to be convinced that the researcher is a non-threatening person and would not harm the organisation in any way. It should be noted that these negotiations took as along as three to four months. The researcher had initially planned to collect data for the study for three weeks to a month but due to administrative problems the researcher was only allowed two weeks. The researcher was, however, allowed to be within the setting of the study for long hours but had to be accompanied by a personnel from the T&D Department at all times.

3.2 The Respondents

The research will begin with the identification of the target group. The respondents of this research are front line staff (henceforth known as FLS) at a private Medical Centre. These front line staff are the first point of contact for the patients (the staff that the patients meet or talk to via the telephone). However, for the purpose of this study only the front line staff who have face-to-face contact with the patients are selected.

The 20 respondents come from three different service groups: the corporate services, the support services and the ancillary services (refer to organisation chart on page 18). The front line staff from the corporate service who are involved in this study, belong to the sub-department patient administration, and they include staff from the business office and
outpatient centre business office. The nursing and support service has a larger number of front line staff. For the purpose of this study, the respondents selected belong to the sub-department support services and involve only the concierge. The last group of front line staff comes from ancillary services and belongs to the sub-department clinical ancillary services that is emergency room and outpatient clinics. For the purpose of this study the respondents come from each of the main service areas mentioned above and their distribution is illustrated below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location/Department</th>
<th>Job Designation</th>
<th>No of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Room- Front Office South Tower</td>
<td>Cashier and Registration Staff</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Floor - OPC</td>
<td>Clinical Assistant</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobby - North Tower/ OPC</td>
<td>Concierge</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Floor - BO/ OPC</td>
<td>Cashier</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th Floor- BO/ OPC</td>
<td>Registration Staff &amp; cashier</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th &amp; 7th Floor- OPC</td>
<td>Office Assistant</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Floor- OPC</td>
<td>Registration staff &amp; cashier</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- OPC - Outpatient Centre
- BO - Business Office

Table 3.1: Distribution of Respondents Based on Job Function

The MC facilities span across three buildings that is the South Tower (the original building), the Outpatient Centre and the North Tower (the newest building). Both the North and South towers house the operating theatres, wards and other medical and its ancillary facilities. The Outpatient Centre houses all the specialist consultant suites and
also medical and its ancillary facilities. The respondents come mostly from the Outpatient Centre because this is where the largest volume of daily communicational activities occur.

Most of the respondents were selected from these sections to enable the researcher to get an overall view of the interactions that take place in a large multi functional organisation like this. In order to get a clear picture of how these respondents function a brief explanation of how they work is important and relevant.

3.2.1. Overview of Job Functions

The Registration Staff and The Cashiers

Levels 3, 4, 6 and 7 of the outpatient centre house the consultant clinic suites (this is the term used at the MC). On each level, there are a number of specialists in different fields of medicine operating their clinics. On level 6, for example, there are the paediatric, gastroenterology, cardiology clinics and the satellite outpatient pharmacy (this is one of the small pharmacies set up at each level to help patients to get their prescription without having to queue up at the main pharmacy). For administrative purposes, at each level there are two registration staff and two cashiers. These registration staff and cashiers belong to the business office of the out patient centre, (which is part of the patient administration department of the corporate services). The registration staff register patients who visit the specific consultants situated on the floor where they work.
While the duty of the cashier is to collect payment and issue receipts for services rendered by the consultants. The duties of the registration staff and the cashiers are 'interchangeable'. This means that these staff are trained to help each other as and when required. This interchangeability is pertinent when the staff are scheduled to work at the emergency room where the registration and cashier's duties are performed by both the front line staff who are on duty. At the Emergency Room the two front line staff on duty often perform the duties of collecting payment and registering patients. For this reason the registration staff and the cashiers need to be familiar with each other's duties.

The Clinical Assistants and The Office Assistants

This group of respondents encompasses front line staff from the ancillary services particularly the clinical ancillary services. At each consultant clinic there is normally a clinical assistant and an office assistant. Their job is to execute all preliminary administrative requirements like locating medical records of the patients and checking on registration procedures before the patient can see the consultant. The clinical assistants have the added task of performing basic medical investigations, which include taking the weight of the patients, recording body temperature and assisting the consultant if required.

The Concierge

There are concierge desks situated at both the towers. The desks are situated at entry points of the hospital buildings, that is at the lobbies. These particular respondents who are support service staff of the nursing and support services were chosen because front
line staff from other areas of the support service like the support staff from the food and beverage and housekeeping engage in minimal communicational interaction. The concierge staff's main duties encompass portage duties like moving patients from one place to another within the hospital and they are the first people that patients consult for assistance, like for directions to the various facilities at the hospital.

Other groups of front line staff from this department (the telephonist, the staff attached to the food and beverage section) were not chosen because it was felt that it would interfere with their duties.

3.3 Sampling of the Respondents

The respondents were selected by the Training and Development Department on the basis of their ability to communicate in English. The selection was left to the Training and Development Department in collaboration with the respective heads or supervisors of each area because they were in a better position to select suitable respondents. The selection was determined on the basis of their regular daily engagement in communicative activities. The respondents' main tasks involve effective communication with the patients. The respondents were selected based on variation in their level of ability to communicate. Therefore, of the two respondents representing each job function, one would be proficient in his/her language ability and the other not quite proficient in his/her language ability. In order for this research to be generic, that is, applicable outside the immediate research environment it must be possible to assume that the population used in the research is representative of the general population to which the research would apply (Selinger and Shohamy). Despite the limited number of participants
involved in this research, they were representative of the overall profile of all the front line staff engaged in each job function. Their homogeneity stems from the fact that they are all front line staff whose primary objective is to serve their customers efficiently. They also abide by the same company policies.

3.4 Needs Analysis as a Data Collection Procedure

A needs analysis would enable the researcher to find out the answers to pertinent questions like what the respondents want to learn (wants), what they lack (inadequacies) and what they need to know (necessities) to be able to function effectively. This research proposes to analyse communicative events in a specific discourse community built on emic concepts, that is an analysis which incorporates the participant’s perspectives and interpretations of behaviour, events and situations (Pike’s, 1964 terminology). In short the research aims to take into account the perceived needs and also the latent needs of a learner and attempts to describe how communication is used in the target occupational environment. It is hoped that a needs analysis procedure might increase the accuracy of the description and facilitate a more realistic selection of course objectives and related pedagogy.

Needs Analysis can be carried out in a variety of ways (as described in the various studies examined in chapter 2). To achieve a wider spectrum of information, a needs analysis procedure must be both inductive (case studies and observations from which courses can be generalised) and deductive (questionnaires, surveys or other data gathering instruments which provide various forms of information as the basis of course design). Mackay (1978) lists basically two formal ways of gathering information pertaining to
needs (namely the questionnaire and the structured interview). Consequently the preceding researchers found that more research instruments would give a better overview. This is particularly important in this study because the research site is a large organisation where communication is multidirectional. Schroder (81) Rechterich and Chancerel (80) suggest that there are essentially four techniques for investigating needs. A comprehensive needs analysis is carried out through a series of steps and phases but the crucial one is selecting the information-gathering instruments. This study will use the following instruments to achieve the aims of this research and also to achieve a ‘thick description’:

a) questionnaire

b) interview (semi-structured and informal)

c) non-participant observation

d) examining related documents

These data collection procedures were used to focus on understanding the communication that takes place within the environment where it occurs, without isolating any of the variables from the context and without making any pre data collection decisions. A variety of sources enabled the researcher to obtain ample and comprehensive data, which would give an overview of the communication that takes place in this organisation. The basis of this research is to study the role communication has on a prescribed setting where the goals set are mutually understood by its members and the goals are also within the expectations of the members. An ethnographic orientation to the needs analysis procedure is necessary as this study concerns the natural interaction of the people studied: what they say and do as they go about their usual routine.
The following discussion will focus on the research tools employed to elicit data:

3.4.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire on the learner's perceived needs is a good start, but it cannot supply all the answers, since the questionnaire constructor begins with certain assumptions that determine the questions. However, this procedure helps to translate the research hypotheses into questions. Questionnaires are useful in cases where data regarding a population is more important than information about an individual. This procedure is essential for a study of this nature because the questions could persuade the person questioned to express an opinion or state a fact, which is important for the researcher to know. This procedure must be related to the respondents' circumstances so that he or she will give the information in his or her possession as precisely as possible (Richterich and Chancerel, 1977). Therefore it is crucial that the researcher determines what kind of information is essential and designs the questions to elicit appropriate information. It is important that the researcher is aware that a section for free response may not provide sufficient information, because not all learners/students have a clear idea and neither can they articulate what they would like the language course to provide. There are many possibilities that might not occur to them which might burden the researcher, as she will not be able to deduce correctly the appropriate information. In order to ensure the information gathered is valid and reliable, observation and attentive listening to respondents should supplement a questionnaire. The researcher should also link the information gathered from the questionnaire with the work environment of the informants.
The questionnaire used for this research contains mixed questions. The researcher has closed questions whereby the respondents' select the answer from a number of possibilities. Some of the questions require the respondents to choose a scale which is appropriate to each individual question. The scale has a range of 1-4 in descending order of capability. The justification for using this 4-point scale instead of the more common 5-point was to ensure that the respondents could not opt for the 'middle path' in situations when they were not certain of the question being asked. It has been established that in a Malaysian context the 4-point scale yielded more accurate responses, as the options would be more discriminating. In addition, the 4-point scale also ensured that the responses were chosen more selectively and accurately (Sarjit Kaur, 1994). The rest of the questions were open-ended questions. This gives the respondents more freedom of expression. The drawback of these types of questions is that it might not be valid or accurate. In order to gather accurate information, these types of questions are guided to a certain extent but at the same time it is not exhaustive. Some of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire are similar but explored from different aspects to ensure that the researcher obtains accurate answers (See appendix B for sample of questionnaire).

The questionnaire is divided into sections, which start with personal details (Questions 1-4), followed by academic qualification (Questions 5-8), and knowledge of languages (Questions 9-12). These details about the identity of the respondents are invariably essential. Trainers will need these information when deciding on the basic infrastructure of the course, for example, the course would have to be conducted within office hours if the majority are married learners with children. These information are also necessary because certain characteristics of the learner's personality may play an important part in determining his behaviour and methods of learning. In addition, as discussed in chapter
two, the details of academic qualification and background of languages are important to
determine what the informants lack in terms of language ability (one of the essential
questions in a needs analysis procedure).

The next section (Questions13-28) pertains to their occupation, the section that
determines the hypotheses of this research. The last section (Questions 29-33) pertains to
the respondents perception of a need for an English course and also to determine the
preferred teaching style of the learners.

The questionnaire is considered long. This is to enable the researcher to get as many
answers to the researcher’s inquiries. One of the reasons why the questionnaire is long is
because it was difficult to get to interview these respondents during a stipulated time and
for a stipulated duration because of the nature of their job. Some of the respondents work
continuously during office hours and they also work on shifts. This situation demanded
that the researcher try to get as many answers as possible from the questionnaire that she
administered. Another reason is because the researcher did not have adequate time to
conduct the study.

The language used to construct the questions in the questionnaire for this research was
simplified on the advice of the Training and Development (T&D) Department of the
Medical Centre. The Manager of the T&D department made it clear that from her
previous experience of administering questionnaires she found that respondents could not
understand the questions if the language used was too difficult or too academic in nature.
It was at her suggestion that the language used is more ‘layman’ in nature. The
questionnaire had to be approved by the T&D Department's Manager and revised by the researcher before it was administered.

3.4.1.1 Administration of the Questionnaire

An officer from the Training and Development Department informed the respondents that they were taking part in a research. They were told that the information was necessary to help the training department to draw up a syllabus to improve their communicational skills in English. The researcher gave out the questionnaire at the end of the day after she made her initial observation. The questionnaire was given at the end so that the respondents would feel comfortable enough to answer the questions truthfully and precisely. The researcher explained any doubts the respondents had about the questions during her initial observation. All the questions were clearly explained by both the researcher and the officer from the T&D department to each respondent individually. This was to ensure that the researcher obtained accurate and precise responses and it would not be necessary for the researcher to go back to the respondents for further queries about the questionnaire. The respondents were given only a day or two to look at the questions and answer them. Some of the respondents also got help from the officer from T&D to answer the questions. The researcher collected most of the questionnaires when she went back to observe the respondents for the second time. The T&D officer helped to collect the rest of the questionnaires, which were not completed on time. The questionnaire was administered to only 13 of the respondents. This was because some of the other respondents worked on shifts and it would have been difficult to keep trace of the questionnaires.
3.4.2. Interview

Interviews are personalised and therefore permit in-depth information to be gathered. This procedure helps to collect information on people's attitudes, impressions and ideas. According to Richterich and Chancerel (1978) an individual who wishes to make a point must fulfil one or more of the following conditions:

- he must be able to appreciate that what he is about to say will be capable of bringing about a desired change;
- he must realise that the interviewer or the body the interviewer represents is in a position to bring about that change;
- he must perceive in the interview a means of expressing himself;

The responses are normally free responses and they account for a level of flexibility that cannot be obtained from other procedures. This mode of inquiry is especially important when gathering information pertaining to the motivational factors that motivate the need to acquire English or any other language.

The researcher conducted two types of interviews:

a) semi-structured interview

b) informal interview

3.4.2.1 Semi-Structured interview

The researcher adopted the above approach to elicit information from the Administrator of the Human Resources Department and the Manager of the Training and Development
Department. Mackay (78) advocates the structured interview where in effect the
interviewee is guided by a set of specific core questions that has already been determined.
The advantage of this type of interview is that the respondent can respond and explain the
answer to the interviewer. In addition Mackay points out that the interviewer can pursue
any interesting new line of inquiry that develops, while having a planned agenda to refer
to. This type of organised line of questioning will also allow the interviewer to
thoroughly prepare all that he/she expects to get answers for. In keeping with the
formality of the interview situation it was more appropriate to conduct a structured
interview. During the interview the researcher was able to make the situation a little less
formal. The researcher used these interviews to qualify the management’s requirement of
the front line staff, particularly their communicational abilities. Some of the queries
included: what language skills do the FLS need to function effectively and efficiently,
how clear is the FLS’s understanding of the wants and needs of the customers and what
are the duties of the FLS as stipulated by the management. The researcher also obtained
other information, related to measurement of excellence and other remunerations, that
would motivate the FLS to improve their communicational skills (See Appendix C and D
for more details of the kinds of questions asked at the semi-structured interviews). The
researcher also intended to obtain information pertaining to training (which includes
language skills) that the trainers from the T&D department have conducted in the past, or
are conducting at present. The response from the structured interviews will answer
queries the researcher needs from the management’s perspective which include the
organisation’s perceived needs and the teacher/trainer’s perceived needs. This is crucial
for the teacher-student-sponsor co-operation (discussed in chapter two) to realise the
formulation of an appropriate syllabus.
3.4.2.2 Informal Interview

The open informal and unstructured interviews were conducted while the researcher was conducting her observation of the respondents. The format of this interview was similar to the questionnaire which was administered. This type of interview includes extensive elaboration and expansion. It resembles a conversation rather than an interview. This method makes the subjects more at ease and willing to give their opinions. These types of informal interviews enable the researcher to obtain responses outside the field of perceived needs. For example, the researcher was able to determine whether the FLS need language skills perceived as necessary for occupational purpose only or whether they needed language skills for any other purpose. The researcher from the beginning had to develop a relationship so as not to make the respondents conscious of the fact that they were taking part in a research. This way the researcher manipulated the questions without the respondents being aware that information was being obtained. This instrument was also used so that the researcher could gather answers to the questions in the questionnaire, which were left unanswered. It has been noted that frequently asked questions are left unanswered in questionnaires. This instrument safeguards this drawback and enabled the researcher to obtain comprehensive data.

These interviews also helped to ascertain subtly other traits in the respondents which might affect their learning and in turn the success of the course. The most important was their attitude towards an English course. Attitude in this precept points to, in general, their attitude to language learning, whether it is positive or negative and also their attitude to English Language, whether they find the language very daunting, etc. These questions are vital to determine whether it is viable to conduct an English course.
Besides conducting informal interviews with the respondents, the researcher was able to talk to one of the administrators who is in-charge of the support services and also some of the specialists who the FLS work for.

3.4.3. Observation

This procedure is a major data collection tool. The researcher needed to supplement the interview and the questionnaire with direct observation of successful target level behaviour.

Candlin [1973], Jupp & Hodlin [1974], Bung [1973] argue that:

task specific language demands can and should be established by study of language in use on the job, and that pragmatically defined language functions constitute the soundest bases for course design – in fact, the indispensable base for a course aimed at developing communicative competence.

The researcher ‘on-the-job’ could also unfold dynamic language interaction. Only on the strength of this database can we discover in qualitative terms the various cognitive and attitudinal language functions entailed in the efficient execution of job-specific tasks, and construct teaching/learning materials which are weighted accordingly. Svedsen and Kreb (1984) in their research states that they “shadowed” their respondents. This method allows the researcher to observe a variety of behaviour taking place simultaneously. The researcher takes the role of non-participant observer who records details as an outsider. This allowed the researcher to note the duties that the respondents needed to do where the communication is in English. She could also note the medium used and the nature of
the spoken interaction that took place. These personal observations were important because the researcher was not allowed to record the exchanges that took place between the respondents and the patients/customers. MC has a policy which does not allow recording of any interaction not even the photographing of any of their facilities. The researcher was able to take down the conversations that took place as exact as possible but it was difficult to maintain the authenticity of the interaction. Moreover, as recordings were not allowed there was no feedback opportunity for reliability and validity of the procedure.

3.4.4 Examining Other Related Documents

The researcher also had the opportunity to examine literature about the facilities-facilities guide, the mission statement, the quality policy and notes called MC facts.

3.5 Triangulation of the Procedure

The use of a variety of methods to collect data allows the researcher to validate findings through triangulation. A driving idea in the development of identifying needs is that it should allow for increased accuracy and decreased bias. To enable a researcher to validate his/her findings, a language needs identification analysis should have a choice of multiple but complementary research tools to obtain and to describe needs. When possible the methods should represent different perspective of needs. Triangulation, therefore, is the notion that 'measurement of a construct such as needs analysis requires more than one instrument' (McKilip 1987). Any of the methods is assumed to present a
unique but not so accurate data concerning the perspective on the need of the target population. Using more than one method can identify the needs more precisely.

As can be seen from the discussion, 'recursiveness', that is the reference made between and among data gathered from the various tools, is an inherent feature of a needs analysis procedure. This is important as it leads to triangulation that would ensure the data to be reliable and valid.

3.6 Analysis of the Data

The researcher aims to adopt Swales (1990) “thick description”. According to Tickoo (1993), the main strength of ESP lies in the thick description of academic and research domains. Tickoo states that it “takes care of both the linguistic and the social-purpose distinctiveness of each genre of specialist language use”. The researcher takes into account all 'relevant and theoretically salient micro and macro contextual influences' (Watson-Gegeo 1992:54). Thus, this study will look at the whole context of use, its reason for being used, the users, the strategies they employ etc. which will account for a thick description to understand what language is and how it is used in this setting.

This research will also adopt Swales 'moves analysis' to analyse some of the data obtained especially the language used. It is believed by Tickoo (1987) that moves analysis “offers a highly insightful and accurate description of the language used and the purposes served in each instance of such language use, which appears to be capable of becoming the basis for pedagogically useful set of learning tasks”. Swales (1990) notes that there is a regular pattern of 'moves' and 'steps' that appear in the majority of genre
investigated. A 'move' is a unit that relates both to the purpose and to the content that is to be communicated. A 'step' is a lower level text unit than the move that provides a detailed perspective on the options open to accomplish the language task. The advantage is that the moves and steps seem to reflect a reality in the way that a task is accomplished. From a pedagogic point of view it is possible to convert the analysis very readily into teaching materials that provide a way into both organisation of the skill in question and its relevant language forms. The researcher hopes that this method of analysis will simplify the task of material preparation.