CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodology of the research, namely the tape-recording of everyday informal conversations among colleagues in a private academic institution and the administration of a questionnaire will be described and explained at length.

3.1 Data Collection Procedures

This research is a qualitative research that was conducted without the manipulation of the researcher and it was carried out in the context in which the subjects work. In order to collect the relevant and necessary data, the researcher tape-recorded spontaneous conversations of her colleagues, namely ten lecturers from an academic institution. The tape-recorded spontaneous conversations were then transcribed and analyzed.

The researcher also administered questionnaires to her subjects to ensure the accuracy of her analysis and to substantiate the analysis of the stipulative terms used by the subjects.

3.2 Subjects

The researcher is teaching in a private institution of higher learning and even before the research was carried out, the researcher had already discovered that her
colleagues, although fluent speakers of Standard English, used Malaysian English often in their informal conversations. Even before the researcher decided to undertake this research, she had already been listening attentively to her colleagues’ informal conversations whenever they were in her office and she knew that they were highly proficient speakers of Standard English. As such, she realized that their so-called “deviations” from Standard English was a sign of their creativity with the language and not errors in spoken English. Hence, a group of ten lecturers from that private institution was selected to become the subjects of the research. The office of the researcher was used as the setting for the spontaneous conversations to take place as it was confined and privacy was assured. The setting of the research allowed for tape-recording to be carried out successfully.

The ten subjects of the research were university graduates who specialized in different fields, namely Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Teaching English as a Second Language, Teaching Bahasa Malaysia, History, Economics and Accounting. In their capacity as lecturers in the private institution, one is a Malaysian Studies lecturer, one is an accounting lecturer and another is a Biology lecturer. The others are a Chemistry lecturer, an Economics lecturer, two English Language lecturers and three Mathematics lecturers. The subjects teach pre-university and university degree courses. All their classes are conducted in English. Out of these ten lecturers who participated in the research, five were involved most of the time in the conversations of the research while the other five were involved occasionally. However, not all the five lecturers who were involved most of the time were present together for every session of conversation. Since
the data collection was based on spontaneous conversations, the researcher could not control the number of subjects that participated at each session.

Of the five main subjects of the research, four were local university graduates while the remaining one graduated with an external degree from the United Kingdom. Of the other five subjects who took part occasionally throughout the data collection, four were local university graduates while the fifth one spent six years in London where she completed her Bachelor's as well as her Master's degree.

Out of the ten subjects of the research, eight of them were Chinese, one was a Punjabi while another was an Indian.

As all the subjects requested the researcher to ensure their anonymity in the report, they were given the labels Speaker A, Speaker B, Speaker C and so on, as shown in the chapter on data analysis. The letters 'X' and 'Y' were used in place of the names of the people who were referred to in the subjects' conversations.

3.3 Research Instruments

Two instruments were used to carry out this research and they are the tape-recording of the subjects' spontaneous conversations and the administering of a questionnaire.

3.3.1 Tape-recording

The aim of this research was to capture spontaneous conversations among speakers of Malaysian English so that stipulative definitions of English terms could be identified. Hence, tape-recording was used as the main instrument of data collection.
because it is only through tape-recording that the actual words of a conversation can be captured most accurately. Tape-recording is also naturalistic in nature (Nunan, 1992:152) and because of this, the researcher was not only able to capture and preserve the spontaneous conversations verbatim but also the other verbal interactions such as fillers, pauses, tone of voice and intonation. All these verbal aspects of speech are essential when analyzing conversations.

Since language use is the main focus of this research and therefore it was important to capture every single word used by the subjects, tape-recording was the most suitable research instrument because a more complex data analysis can be conducted (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996). According to Sapsford and Jupp, tape-recording can also provide a complete and accurate record of behaviour since transcribing will be done as soon as tape-recording is completed. As the researcher is transcribing, he/she is able to stop and replay the tape, enabling the significant contextual elements to be extracted accurately (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989). Tape-recording also allows for objectivity (Nunan, 1992:152) as a researcher who uses this instrument to collect data has to transcribe word for word. It follows that the researcher can only make inferences or give opinions during the data analysis based on the transcription of the data collected.

Since applied linguistics researchers are generally interested in the language used by their subjects (Nunan, 1992), tape-recording as the main instrument for gathering data would be the most obvious choice. Nonetheless, this is not the only option as a researcher can still choose to do note-taking to conduct his/her research (Nunan, 1992:152). As opposed to tape-recording where transcription of the data will be done after the completion of the tape-recording, note-taking is done within the research setting itself. If
not, it must be done as soon as possible after the observation so that there will not be a
greater chance of inaccuracy and biases (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989). Note-taking allows
the researcher to gain first-hand experience with the subjects and he/she is able to record
the necessary information as it occurs (Creswell, 1994). According to Creswell, unusual
and creative aspects can also be noticed and taken down immediately during the
observation.

Although the researcher had two choices of instruments to carry out her data
collection, she chose tape-recording as she felt that tape-recording compared to note-
taking was more reliable. Since the researcher needed to capture every single word and
sentence uttered by her subjects so that the stipulative terms used by them could be
identified, it was therefore an impossibility to do note-taking in this research. If the
researcher did not have good listening skills and was not able to write down the words
and sentences fast enough, important information may be lost (Creswell, 1994).
Moreover, taking notes meant the researcher had to be at the research setting all the time
whenever conversations among the subjects took place so that no important information
would be left out. Since the researcher is a full-time lecturer, it was therefore not feasible
to do note-taking to record spontaneous conversations as it was too time-consuming.
Hence, the researcher decided that it was more appropriate to tape-record the
conversations since more data could be collected from tape-recording compared to note-
taking and the researcher could do the transcribing after office-hours.

Tape-recording is also more reliable than note-taking because it is an
"unobtrusive method of collecting data" (Creswell, 1994:150). Although initially the
subjects would feel a little uncomfortable knowing that their conversations were being
tape-recorded, the uneasiness would gradually leave them as they become caught up in their topics of conversations. Hence, tape-recording actually allows for a smooth progression of the conversations as the subjects will not be interrupted by the researcher. On the other hand, in note-taking, the researcher has to constantly halt the conversations so that he/she can take down the important sections of the conversations before the subjects continued. Interruptions such as these may hamper the flow of communication as the subjects’ train of thoughts might be disrupted or they may feel a little reluctant to speak freely because the researcher is seen as intrusive (Creswell, 1994). In note-taking, the researcher also has to be extremely attentive to the conversations of his/her subjects or else the necessary data may be missed. This is especially so in an environment where there are many external distractions. On the other hand, data collection through tape-recording will not be interrupted by external distractions since transcribing is usually done in a less distracting environment after tape-recording has been carried out.

Although tape-recording is more reliable compared to taking notes, it also has several limitations. Firstly, there is the possibility of data overload (Nunan, 1992:152; Sapsford and Jupp, 1996) with the result that there may be too much data to transcribe and subsequently to analyze. Transcribing is usually very time-consuming. In order to transcribe a sixty-minute cassette, a researcher may actually take a day or sometimes even more than that. Although tape-recording can be very tedious, researchers who use tape-recording as their research instrument are always faced with the temptation of wanting to transcribe everything (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996). Hence, transcribing becomes even more time-consuming. Aside from being time-consuming, tape-recording can also be expensive since the researcher needs to equip him/herself with a sufficient number of
cassettes before he/she can collect the necessary data. The researcher also needs to ensure that the recording of the data is of high technical quality (Patton, 1990; Sapsford and Jupp, 1996). If this is not taken into consideration, transcribing may become a rather distressing activity for the researcher. Tape-recording can provide an almost accurate account of language use in a particular setting. However, it does not provide a complete record of behaviour (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996) as it is only limited to the capturing of the "vocal aspects of a verbal interaction" (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989) within a research setting. Tape-recording also cannot adequately record complex verbal interaction and it is not generalizable to a wider social context (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996).

The data for this research was obtained from a private academic institution of higher learning in Klang. Throughout a period of one month, the tape-recording of spontaneous conversations among the subjects who were lecturers in various academic programs was conducted. Recording could only be carried out whenever the researcher and the subjects had free time and whenever there were at least two lecturers in the office to begin a conversation lengthy enough to be tape-recorded. The result was a total of five hours and thirty minutes of spontaneous conversations. The subjects who came into the researcher's office to chat were free to talk about anything. Their topics of conversations were not pre-planned by them or even by the researcher. The office had a confined environment and therefore, at any one time, throughout the course of the tape-recording, only between four to five lecturers were involved.

One of the limitations of tape-recording mentioned above is that it only captures the vocal aspects of a verbal discourse. This limitation did not affect this particular research since the focus of the research was on language usage, namely the creative use
of English by Malaysians. Fortunately for the researcher, there were no technical problems. The technical quality of the tape-recording was satisfactory in that the recording was clear enough for transcribing since the Walkman used for recording was of a good quality.

One of the abovementioned limitations of tape-recording was experienced by the researcher in the course of the data collection. The researcher found transcription to be indeed tedious and extremely time-consuming as each tape took at least two days to transcribe. The researcher was unable to transcribe only selected sections of the spontaneous conversations since she felt that the identification of the stipulative terms could only be done through word-for-word transcription. Nonetheless, the researcher felt rewarded in the end even though transcribing was tedious because she was able to identify quite a number of stipulative terms from the data collected. Even before she decided on using tape-recording as the main instrument for data collection, the researcher was already well aware that it would involve a lot of time and tedium. However, she was quite prepared to face it since she believed that tape-recording was the most appropriate research instrument to collect data for this research. Deciding on what to transcribe was the main problem for the researcher during the data collection process. This usually happened in situations where verbal interactions between subjects became complex as more than one conversation was taking place simultaneously. It was impossible for the researcher to transcribe all the conversations that were taking place all at once. Hence, to solve this problem, the researcher transcribed the conversation which was nearest to the Walkman and was therefore the clearest and most coherent.
3.3.2 Questionnaire

A questionnaire is administered in a research to collect data on a phenomenon that is not easily observed such as attitudes, motivation or self-concepts. It can also be used to collect data on processes that are involved in language usage as well as to obtain background information about research subjects that is, their age, number of languages spoken, years of studying a language, etc (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989).

Most of the time, a questionnaire is administered in a research as it is less expensive compared to other research instruments (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996:102). Most researchers find that it is much faster to collect data by administering a questionnaire compared to other data collection methods as it can be self-administered and given to a large group of subjects at the same time (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996; Seliger and Shohamy, 1989:172). A questionnaire also permits the subjects to remain anonymous and because of this, honest responses can be elicited from respondents. According to Seliger and Shohamy (1989:172), “as anonymity is assured, subjects tend to share information of a more sensitive nature easily”.

Nonetheless, there are still some limitations in using a questionnaire in a research. A questionnaire often has a low response rate (Patton, 1990; Seliger and Shohamy, 1989; Sapsford and Jupp, 1996) as most people find it a chore to fill up, more so if there are many questions to be answered. Unless the questionnaire is able to “engage the respondents interests or they feel that it is valuable to them” (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996:102) a questionnaire will usually have a relatively low response rate and this will influence the validity of a research’s findings (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989:172). Although this research instrument is inexpensive, a researcher must still consider his/her
subjects' literacy level before deciding on a questionnaire. Some subjects may have writing or reading problems and for these reasons, a researcher cannot administer a questionnaire as there will be no assurance that the questions have been properly understood and correctly answered by the subjects (Seliger and Shohamy, 1989). If the questions in the questionnaire are not properly worded, this may cause confusion on the part of the subjects and subsequently, inaccuracy in the data may occur.

A questionnaire with a total of seven questions regarding the language background of each respondent was also administered to all the lecturers who were the subjects of this research (please see Appendix A). This questionnaire provided the researcher with necessary and applicable information on each of the subjects so that a more accurate data analysis could be done which would ultimately enable a more meticulous and realistic representation of the current status of Malaysian English. The subjects of the research were given the questionnaire as the researcher wanted to find out the reason behind each term being given a stipulative definition by its speaker by correlating the speaker's use of language with his/her language background.

The questionnaire consisted of seven closed questions. They were directed at discovering the language background of each subject. The first two questions are general questions pertaining to the area of specialty and age of the subjects. Questions three to seven deal with the subjects' mother tongue as well the languages that the subjects used at home, in the office and while they were in school.

The researcher had no problems administering the questionnaires to the subjects and they returned them to her promptly. All the subjects answered the questions
accurately and none of them had any problems understanding the questions in the questionnaire.

3.4 Process of Data Analysis

When the tape-recording of the subjects' spontaneous conversations was completed, they were then transcribed. The transcriptions of the spontaneous conversations were hand-written into exercise books for convenience and easy reading. The transcriptions were then analyzed for the main purpose of identifying the English terms or words that have stipulative definitions that is, different meanings from that found in the dictionary (lexical definitions). For ease of reference and to avoid confusion on the part of the readers as well as the researcher, and also to protect the identity of the subjects, the subjects involved in each conversational episode were labeled Speaker A, Speaker B, Speaker C, etc. This can be seen in the chapter on data analysis. It has to be borne in mind that Speaker A of a particular dialogue may not be the Speaker A of another dialogue. As has been mentioned earlier, this method of labeling is for clarity and convenience sake and to circumvent confusion. The people referred to in the conversations were given the labels X and Y.

Throughout the data analysis process, a dictionary was used to determine the lexical definitions of the identified English terms. To avoid confusion on the part of the researcher and the readers, only one dictionary was used as reference, that is the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary.

The stipulative definitions found in the tape-recording were categorized into two large sections, namely Localized Features and Grammar Items.
3.4.1 Localized Features

Localized features are terms that are distinctively Malaysian in their stipulative definitions. This means that the definitions could be a direct translation from any one of the local languages or dialects that are in existence in Malaysia such as Bahasa Malaysia, Hokkien, Mandarin, Cantonese and Tamil. These terms are also considered localized features because they are only used in Malaysia and this means that in order for a person to understand the definition of the term in context, he/she must either be a Malaysian or someone who has been living in Malaysia for quite a while now.

The localized features identified were then grouped into different sub-categories and they are Descriptions of Time, Local Terms, Fillers, Figurative Expressions, Question Forms and Expressions of Emphasis.

3.4.1.1 Descriptions of Time

The terms that fall under this sub-category are used to describe time, for example, "yesterday", "today" and "tomorrow". However, within the Malaysian context, the terms used have a different meaning from the dictionary meaning and hence, they can only be understood by Malaysians. The stipulative definitions of these words may have been derived from a local language or dialect of Malaysia.

3.4.1.2 Local Terms

Under this category, the terms identified are undoubtedly Malaysian and have been specially created to signify or represent something that can only be found in
Malaysia such as rojak, roti canai, cendol and kampung. Nonetheless, within the context of Malaysia, these terms are also given a stipulative definition by Malaysians so that they can better express themselves without having to elaborate in great depth or use lengthy sentences.

3.4.1.3 Fillers

Fillers are words or utterances that are used in spoken language to fill a gap in a sentence while the speaker is reflecting or thinking of what to say next. Examples of common fillers are “you know”, “like”, “um...” and “er...”. Malaysian English also has its own fillers that are commonly used by Malaysian speakers of English such as “man”, “anything” and “something”. These terms do have an initial lexical definition that cannot be placed within the context of a conversation when the speaker’s intention is to use these terms as fillers. Hence, users of Malaysian English create a stipulative definition for each of these terms.

3.4.1.4 Figurative Expressions

Some phrases or sentences cannot be understood in a literal sense because there are implied meanings or connotations that come along with the phrases or sentences. They are known as figurative expressions in English. Most of the figurative expressions that are frequently used today are “borrowed” from our Western counterparts, namely the native speakers of English. Nonetheless, with the widespread use of Malaysian English in Malaysia, Malaysians are establishing their own figurative expressions in English that are largely influenced by their culture and local dialects. These phrases and sentences are
once again strikingly Malaysian and therefore have no resemblance whatsoever to their lexical definitions.

3.4.1.5 Question Forms

Question forms can be conventionally divided into two categories and they are WH-question forms such as “What”, “Why” and “Who” and questions that only require a “Yes” or “No” answer such as “Are you hungry?” or “May I come in?”. Malaysians do not always use these conventional question forms to ask questions. In fact, these question forms are often used in a more formal setting such as a meeting or in a classroom. In the case of a non-formal environment, Malaysians are more comfortable using “Malaysianized” question forms that are brief and economical such as “Is it?” or “Yes-ah?”. These “Malaysianized” question forms can easily be understood by anyone born and bred in Malaysia.

3.4.1.6 Expressions of Emphasis

Some words or terms used by Malaysians to stress a point or to emphasize something may seem irrelevant or redundant but they are effective means of conveying a message, nonetheless. Expressions of emphasis that are commonly used by Malaysians are “also”, “already” and “actually”. These terms, again, cannot be comprehended through their lexical definitions and thus, native speakers of English may think that they sound peculiar.
3.4.2 Grammar Items

The grammar items found to have stipulative definitions were sub-categorized into Adjectives and Verbs.

3.4.2.1 Adjectives

In the context of language, adjectives are words or terms that describe something, for instance "ugly", "smart", "small" and "fat". There is a long list of adjectives that can be found in the English Language, each with its own lexical definition. Although these lexical definitions are known and understood by Malaysians, stipulative definitions have been developed for some of these adjectives. For example, the word "hot" has the lexical definition of "warm" but used by a Malaysian, it acquires the stipulative definition that one is furious or very angry.

3.4.2.2 Verbs

Verbs are words that describe actions or movements such as "talk", "fight" and "hit". In Malaysian English, there are quite a number of verbs that have been given stipulative definitions. For instance, the word "wallop" is used in Malaysian English to mean "eat greedily, like a glutton" and not "to hit" as the dictionary meaning suggests. Verbs like "wallop" have therefore taken on stipulative definitions that extend beyond their lexical definitions.
3.5 Limitations of the Research

Although the researcher generally felt that tape-recording was the most appropriate data collection instrument to use in this research, some setbacks were encountered.

Firstly, the researcher used a Walkman with a built-in speaker to tape-record the spontaneous conversations. This meant that conversations would only be clear enough to be transcribed if the subjects spoke close enough to the microphone. However, some of the speakers were quite a distance from the microphone and this resulted in certain sentences being rather unclear. As such, the researcher was not able to transcribe them. Where this occurred, the researcher has indicated it in the transcription with the label "(unclear)". Fortunately, it was found that the unclear portions did not undermine the context of the dialogues and so these dialogues, if they were relevant to the research could be used.

As the tape-recorded conversations were spontaneous, the researcher could not control the context of the conversation nor the number of speakers in each dialogue. Therefore, the researcher felt that conversations that were overly personal or sensitive because they pertained to the academic institution had to be omitted. The researcher also found it difficult to transcribe conversations where there were more than two speakers speaking at any one time because the speakers tended to interrupt one another or two or three speakers spoke at the same time. With these two problems at hand, transcribing took a longer period of time and irrelevancies were ineluctable.
Since the data collection was confined to lecturers' informal spontaneous conversations outside the classroom, some of the stipulative terms used cannot be generalized to all Malaysian speakers of English.

This chapter has given a detailed explanation of the two research instruments that were used in this research. In the next chapter, the data collected by using these research instruments will be analyzed and discussed at length.