CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0   INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the sampling, instrumentation, methodology and procedures used in analysing the data.

3.1   SUBJECTS

A group of forty homogeneous Form Four Chinese students of Sekolah Menengah Tanah Merah Site 'C' was carefully selected for this study. Sek. Men. Tanah Merah Site 'C' is a semi-rural school in the Seremban/Port Dickson district of Negeri Sembilan. Form Four students were chosen for this study because they do not have to sit for any major public examination and hence, a request to use them as respondents for this study would be made more permissible by the headmaster.

The respondents selected were all Chinese students as they formed the majority (about 90%) of students from this ethnic group in this school. The selection of the students was based on their English proficiency level. The forty students belonged to two classes in Form Four. Their ESL proficiency

was considered low, based on their PMR results. Most of them scored a 'C' in their PMR examination. These students also formed a homogeneous group in terms of age, native language, social and educational background and exposure to English.

General information regarding the students' educational and socio-economic background was taken from the class register as well as their personal record cards (001 cards) kept by the school. The information gathered showed that the students were mainly from the middle-income group. Most of their parents were pig farmers.

All these students completed their primary education for six years under the Chinese medium of instruction, followed by four years of Malay medium instruction from Remove class to Form Three. These students have completed eight successive years of formal instruction in ESL: four years at primary school (students in vernacular schools start learning English from Standard Three onwards) and four years at secondary school. The students do not converse in English among their peers or among family members at home. Their exposure to English is therefore, minimal and limited to the language confined in the classroom.

.2   RESEARCH TOOLS

n the selection of research tools, the researcher took into consideration the
spect of avoidance strategy that students may employ in dealing with the
imple past and past progressive tenses. A better account of the simple past
nd past progressive problems encountered by the students could be gathered
y 'forcing' them to use and produce these structures. Hence, this is the main
eason for the two methods of elicitation of errors used in this study, namely,
1) a free-writing task and (2) a structured test. They can still avoid using
ertain structures of the simple past and past progressive tenses in the free-
vriting task but not in the structured test. However, (1) is a better task.

.2.1 Free-Writing Task

he students were required to write an essay of about 350 to 500 words each
n the topic 'A frightening experience'(see Appendix D). The students were
amiliar with the task given as they had written such essays in class before.
hey were assigned to write the essay as part of formal class-work in a one-
our session.

he free-writing task is to test the students' ability to use the simple past tense
nd the past progressive tense in sentences created according to the context
iven. Language experts and teachers generally hold the view that essay

writing is a good instrument for sampling the language of students. Heaton (1988) maintains that essay writing is a useful writing tool as '...it provides the students with an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to organise language material, using their own words and ideas, and to communicate' (p. 137).

3.2.2 Structured Test

The students were each given a structured test which test the use of the simple past tense and past progressive tense (see Appendix A). The students had to complete the test in a one-hour session in class. The test, which was devised by the researcher, consisted of two sections, which covered the rules for the simple past and past progressive tenses. 'A university grammar of English' by Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) and 'Fundamentals of English Grammar' by Azar (1992) were used as references. The rationale for the structured test was to elicit the simple past and past progressive tenses as well as to provide a more complete picture of the students' knowledge of these two tense forms.

In Section A of the test, the students had to fill in the blanks (sentence level) by changing the form of the verbs given in parentheses. There were 36 items altogether: 18 simple past and 18 past progressive. The discrete point test in Section A would '... yield data which are easily quantifiable, as well as allowing a wide coverage of items' (Weir, 1990, p. 2).

n Section B of the test, the students had to fill in three selective deletion gap-
filling passages (text level) using the correct form of the verbs given. There
were also 36 items: 18 simple past and 18 past progressive. The rationale for
his kind of test is that it enables '...the test constructor to determine where
deletions are to be made and to focus on those items which have been
selected a priori as being important to a particular target audience' (Weir, 1990,
p. 48). The three passages (text level) used in this section would test the
students' usage of the simple past and past progressive tenses in context.

The following are the question numbers of the simple past and past
progressive tenses (see Appendix A) tested in Sections A and B:

TABLE 3.1   Question Numbers of the Simple Past Tense and Past

Progressive Tense in the Structured Test

Structured Test	Simple Past	Past Progressive
Section A	2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 15, 17,19,20,23,27,28,31,33, 35,36	1, 4, 5, 9, 12, 13, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 32, 34
Section B	43, 44, 46, 49, 50, 51, 54, 56, 59, 64, 66, 67, 72, 73, 74, 77, 79, 81	37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 52, 53, 55, 58, 60, 61, 62, 63, 68, 69, 70, 75, 76
Total	36	36

Question numbers 42, 45, 47, 48, 57, 65, 71, 78 and 80 are not taken into account in the analysis although students had to fill in the blanks with their answers. This is because the researcher wanted to have an equal number of items for both the simple past and past progressive tenses. Thus, the verb forms from these 9 items have not been taken into account, as there were already other examples of such verb forms tested.

3.3 THE ENGLISH VERB FORMS

According to The Oxford Companion To The English Language (1992), a verb refers to 'A class of words that serve to indicate the occurrence or performance of an action, or the existence of a state or condition' (p. 1083). There are two main types of verbs: full verbs and auxiliary verbs. Full verbs are lexical verbs (Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973) and in terms of form, full verbs are divided into regular and irregular verb forms. Auxiliaries are divided into primary auxiliaries (be, have, do) and modal auxiliaries or modal verbs (may, can, will, shall, must, ought to, need, dare). This study focuses on the full verbs and the primary auxiliaries. Errors are identified within this framework.

3.3.1 Definition of terms

The definition of terms (from Quirk and Greenbaum, 1973) given below are the definitions used in this study:

(i) **Tense**

Tense refers to the grammatical category, expressed in forms of the verb, that locates a situation in time. In English, tense is expressed in all finite verb phrases, whereas non-finite verb phrases do not have tense marking. In this study, tense is used to refer to the simple past and the past progressive forms.

(ii) **Simple past tense**

The simple past tense is used to refer to an event/state as having taken place at a particular point of time in the past. Adding `d' or `ed' to the

base verb of regular verbs forms the tense. The past tense markers are underlined as in the examples below:

Base form	Past tense form
stay	stay<u>ed</u>
search	search<u>ed</u>
look	*look<u>ed</u>*
live	liv<u>ed</u>

Some verbs are irregular. These verbs form the simple past tense by having changes in the base verb, following certain rules. For example,

Base form	Past tense form
break	broke
catch	caught
sing	sang
teach	taught

Some irregular verbs in the simple past tense are the same as the base verb. The examples below illustrate this:

Base form	Past tense form
cut	cut
hurt	hurt
put	put
shut	shut

The simple past tense often occurs with adverbs or adverb phrases of past time such as `yesterday', `just now', `a few minutes ago' or `a week ago' to show past action at a definite time in the past. The simple past tense verbs are underlined in the examples below:

1. The steamer <u>sailed</u> yesterday.
2. I <u>received</u> his letter a week ago.

Sometimes the simple past tense is used without an adverb of time. In such cases, the time may be either implied or indicated by the context as shown in the following examples:

1. She <u>bought</u> this car in Scotland.
2. They <u>won</u> the first prize in an essay-writing competition.

iii)   **Past progressive form**

The past progressive is used to denote an action going on at some time in the past. The time of the action may or may not be indicated. The past progressive is formed when the primary auxiliary *'be'* is followed by a present participle form (*be + V-ing*). The following examples illustrate the use of the past progressive tense. The tense is underlined in each sentence.

1.   He <u>was riding</u> his bicycle.

2.   He <u>was travelling</u> on a narrow estate road.

The past progressive is also used to describe two continuous actions going on at the same time in the past. The examples are as follows:

1.   While I <u>was writing</u> the letter, he <u>was whistling</u>.

2.   While they <u>were admiring</u> the dresses, he <u>was looking</u> at the flower   arrangements.

Used with a point in time, the past progressive tense expresses an action, which began before that time and probably continued after it. In this case, the time expression can be replaced with a verb in the simple past tense. The following sentences convey the idea that the action in

the past continuous started the action in the simple past tense and probably continued after it.

1.   When I <u>arrived</u>, Susan <u>was talking</u> on the phone.

2.   He <u>was taking</u> a shower when the phone <u>rang</u>.

(iv)   **Regular verbs**

Regular verbs have the following forms:

base form	*-ing* participle	*-s* form	past/*-ed* participle
1. call	calling	calls	called
2. like	liking	likes	liked
3. try	trying	tries	tried
4. walk	walking	walks	walked

The above forms are regular in view of the fact that the forms can be predicted if the base of such a verb is known. Regular lexical verbs have the same *–ed* inflection for both the past tense and the *–ed* participle.

)   Irregular verbs

Like regular verbs, the *–s* form and *–ing* participle in irregular verbs are predictable from the base form.   However, the past and the past participle forms in irregular verbs cannot be predicted from the base. Irregular verbs differ from regular verbs in that they either do not have a /d/ or /t/ inflection (drink ~ drank ~ drunk). They usually have variation in their base vowel (bite ~ bit ~ bitten).   Furthermore, they have a varying number of distinct forms.

vi)   Primary auxiliaries

In this study, auxiliary verbs refer to the primary auxiliaries. The primary auxiliaries are *'be'*, *'have'* and *'do'*. Auxiliary verbs are used with full verbs as 'helping' verbs.   *'Be'*, *'have'* and *'do'* function not only as auxiliaries, but also as full verbs.   However, except for *'be'*, the auxiliaries do not have the full range of *'non-finite forms'* (the infinitive and the participles). *'Be'* has eight different forms: in the present tense, *'am'* with first-person singular subjects; in the present tense, *'is'* with third-person singular subjects; in the present tense, *'are'* with the other pronouns; in the past tense, *'was'* with singular subjects; in the past tense, *'were'* with plural subjects and also with *'you'* (second person

pronoun) when used in the singular; a present participle *'being'*; a past participle *'been'*; *'be'* itself, used as the infinitive and imperative.

4   METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The method of analysis consists of the following steps: collection of data, identification of errors, classification of errors, quantification of errors, description of errors and analysis of sources of errors. These steps are further explained as follows:

4.1 Collection of data

The forty selected students had to write a composition each, as well as to sit for a structured test. The data were then collected for the identification of errors.

4.2 Identification of errors

The data collected from forty compositions and forty structured tests were then marked for simple past and past progressive errors. Verb forms, which violate the grammatical rules of English, would be considered as errors. The grammar rules referred to are based on the contemporary Standard British English usage as illustrated by Quirk and Greenbaum (1973).

.4.3 Classification of errors

The identified errors were then categorised into error types according to Corder's (1981) taxonomy of errors: selection errors, addition errors and omission errors.   These errors were classified according to distributional occurrence.   The three error categories are illustrated below:

Selection errors

Selection errors occurred when students selected the incorrect verb form to be used in place of a correct form.   The three major types of selection errors in the simple past are illustrated in Table 3.2 below:

TABLE 3.2 Types of Selection Errors in the Simple Past Tense

Types of errors	Examples
1. The use of the simple present instead of the simple past.	*She <u>prepares</u> lunch before she she went out. (prepared)
2. The use of incorrect verb forms.	*He <u>taked</u> a knife. (took)
3. The use of the past progressive instead of the simple past.	*I <u>was running</u> to them. (ran)

The following examples in Table 3.3 illustrate the three major types of selection errors in the past progressive:

TABLE 3.3   Types of Selection Errors in the Past Progressive Tense

Types of Errors	Examples
1. The use of the simple past instead of the past progressive.	*While they <u>admired</u> the dresses, he was looking at the flower arrangements. (were admiring)
2. The use of the simple present instead of the past progressive.	*One afternoon, Halim <u>comes</u> home from school when he saw an accident. (was coming)

Addition errors

Addition errors occurred when the students added an unnecessary item before the verb. There are three major types of addition errors of the simple past as shown in Table 3.4:

TABLE 3.4   Types of Addition Errors in the Simple Past Tense

Types of Errors	Examples
1. Addition of BE (was) before the simple past verb	*Daddy <u>was</u> picked up the chair.
2. Addition of BE (were) before the simple past verb	*We <u>were</u> also went to the rooms.
3. Addition of BE (are) before the simple past verb	*We <u>are</u> felt frightened.

Omission errors

This category of errors occurred when the students omitted a verb. The two types of omission errors of the simple past are illustrated in Table 3.5 below:

TABLE 3.5   Types of Omission Errors in the Simple Past Tense

Types of Errors	Examples
1. Omission of copula BE	*I ^ so frightened. (was)
2. Omission of main verb	*He told me where he ^ from. (came)

The following are the two types of omission errors of the past progressive as illustrated in Table 3.6:

TABLE 3.6   Types of Omission Errors in the Past Progressive Tense

Types of Errors	Examples
1. Omission of auxiliary BE	*She ^ looking at me. (was)
2. Omission of '-ing' form	*He was <u>scold</u> them. (scolding)

.4.4 Quantification of errors

he errors in the three categories were counted and tabulated separately for
e free-writing task and structured test. The figures obtained would indicate
e frequency of the errors and the percentage of incorrect usage.

.4.5 Description of errors

he kinds of errors in the simple-past tense and past progressive tense found
 the corpus would be described in terms of deviations from contemporary
tandard British English usage.

.4.6   Analysis of sources of errors

he objective of the analysis of sources of errors is to examine the possible auses of errors found in the corpus.   It is hoped that knowledge of the ossible causes of errors would help the researcher discover the language earning difficulties of her Chinese students in the use of the simple past and ast progressive tenses, and hence look for appropriate strategies to resolve hese difficulties.