CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This paper is aimed at analysing data from the questionnaire and the test on wh and yes-no questions given to 80 Form V students of Sekolah Menengah Ugama (Arab), Shamsul Maarif (Girls), Pulai Chondong.

The aim of the questionnaire is to obtain data regarding the students' background that could help explain reasons for their incompetence in English and in particular in formulating questions.

The researcher who is also the English teacher of the school is in the view that the students would not be able to enjoy learning the English language or interact in the language until they have had the competence on how to form wh and yes-no questions.

Therefore, this chapter will identify, classify and explain the errors made in forming questions. It will also discuss the data obtained from the questionnaire. It is hoped that the results of the test would be
of great help to the teachers in particular to help them deal with students with problems in question-formation especially in preparing for their English paper in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) Examination.

3.1 Sample

The sample comprises 80 Form V students of a religious secondary school, Shamsul Maarif (Girls), Pulai Chondong, Machang Kelantan. All of them are 18 years of age and who have studied English for twelve years, including one year in the remove class.

80 students from the school’s best two classes, namely Form V Khadijah (A) and Form V Aishah (B) were chosen as the sample of the study. They will provide the data by answering the questionnaire and taking the test. The two instruments were devised by the researcher.

The choice of the two “best” classes as the sample is seen as representing, the other Form V population of the school. Through the researcher’s observation, even the students in these classes are not able to form questions accurately. Therefore, the data from these classes would also reflect the extent of the problem faced in other classes.
Due to time factor and administrative constraints, the researcher could not include all the 205 Form V students of the school in this research. Therefore, 6 students were selected for pilot-testing of the questionnaire and the test and 80 students were selected for the actual study.

3.1.1 The Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire is to gather information about language proficiency and English usage at home and at school. This includes items which elicited information on students' involvement in a wide range of activities to improve their English, for example, how much of their course work (excluding the English subject) is done in English, and how they, as Arabic school students, describe the importance of using English in the following language skills:

(a) listening
(b) speaking
(c) reading, and
(d) writing.

The data from the questionnaire would provide a general picture of the students' background regarding their usage of English and this would in turn help to explain their difficulty in formulating questions as
less usage would entail less interaction in the language and therefore, less opportunity to formulate questions.

The questionnaire is made up of three parts:

Part I: Students are to provide information about their proficiency in English.

Part II: Students are to provide information on English language usage at home, for instance, the frequency of using English with the family, neighbours and the nature of encouragement from older siblings to improve their English.

Part III: Students are to provide information about English usage at school, such as how often they use English with their teachers, classmates, office staff and friends.

A copy of the questionnaire is provided in Appendix 1.

The questionnaire consisted of Likert-like scale in order to limit the responses and facilitate easy analysis of the data. The students were first briefed on the aim of the questionnaire.

3.1.2 The Test

The purpose of this test was to obtain data on the errors on forming questions made by the form five students who have been learning English for 12 years.
The researcher has specifically devised the test to obtain data on errors made when students formed questions namely the wh and yes-no questions.

The decision to test students on wh and yes-no question is because the researcher, through his observation, finds that even form five students have difficulty in forming the simplest kinds of questions namely wh and yes-no questions.

3.1.3 Types Of Questions

The test consists of four sections, namely Section A, B, C and D.

Section A: Forming wh interrogatives.

In Section A students are to form questions from the given sentences with some of their constituents underlined.

There are 8 questions in this section.

Students are to come up with the appropriate wh word in place of the underlined constituent in order to form a question, for example:
Given statement: Mary’s cat was found in the drain.

Sample answer: Whose cat was found in the drain?

A list of the wh words was included in the test to assist the students namely:

- Whose, Who
- Which, Whom
- When, How
- Where, Why

‘What’ was not included in the list of wh words given because the researcher found, through his observation, that most students have the tendency to use ‘what’ in most of their questions. The exclusion of ‘what’ would therefore overcome the situation and students are made to actually think of the appropriate question word rather than taking the easy way out by using ‘what’ in all instances when forming questions.

Section B: Yes/No Questions.

Students are to form yes-no questions, using verbs to-be ‘is, are, was, were,’ from the given statements, for example:

Given statement: You need to know whether it is a boarding school.

Sample answer: Is it a boarding a school?
There are four questions in this section.

Section C

Students are to form yes-no questions, using auxiliary verbs 'have, has, had' and 'modals – can, will', from the given statements, for example:

Given statement: A dentist will visit our school next month.
Sample answer: Will a dentist visit our school next month?

There are five questions in this section.

Section D

Students are to form yes-no questions, using 'do' verbs namely 'does, do, did,' from the given statements, for example:

Given statement: You want to know whether Encik Leman goes to the mosque at 5.00 a.m. every morning.
Sample answer: Does Encik Leman go to the mosque at 5.00 a.m. every morning?

There are three questions in this section.
The total number of questions is 20. A sample of the test is provided in Appendix 2.

3.2 Piloting

3.2.1 The Questionnaire

The questionnaire was initially pilot tested on six form five students to find out if the statements were easily understood as well as to eliminate sources of ambiguity. The instrument was modified and improved based on the feedback from the pilot test.

3.2.2 The Test

Six form five students were selected for the pilot testing of the test paper. The idea of conducting the pilot test was to check the clarity of the test paper and whether enough time is given for the test. As a result of the pilot testing, the researcher made some amendments to the test.

3.3 Procedure Of Error Analysis

The students’ errors will be explained by means of Error Analysis (EA). The step below shows the summary of EA.
(1) DATA COLLECTION
(2) ERROR IDENTIFICATION
(3) ERROR CLASSIFICATION
(4) ERROR EXPLANATION

3.3.1 Data Collection

The questionnaires were distributed on 12th November 1998, at Sekolah Menengah Ugama (Arab) Shamsul Maarif (Girls), Pulai Chondong, in Form V Khadijah and Form V Aishah classes by the researcher, assisted by fellow teachers.

The students took about 45 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Upon completion of the questionnaire, the researcher collected the papers.

The researcher explained all the questions in the questionnaire to the respondents as to avoid any misunderstanding. While filling in the questionnaire, students were allowed to ask questions in order to clarify any doubts that they may have.
The test was administered to the 80 students on 13th November, 1998 by the researcher and assisted by fellow teachers of the school, in Form V Khadijah and Form V Aishah classes. The students were given 75 minutes to complete the test.

The researcher explained to the students what they were required to do for each of the sections in the test. Examples and question words were also given in the test paper to further assist the students in forming the questions.

3.3.2 Error Identification

How does one identify an error? Angeli (1989: 294) defines errors as “any form or construction which deviates in anyway from that considered to be acceptable for standard written academic English.”

In this study, two kinds of errors will be looked at, that is lexical and syntactic errors. If the incorrect question word is used for the question, this is considered as a lexical error. If the question word is not placed in initial position of the question (fronted) this will be classified as a syntactic error, based on the various types of questions given.
Corder’s definition of errors will be adopted in this study. Corder (1981) describes the deviant form in learners’ language as errors of competence and performance. Only systematic errors and constantly recurring errors are “breaches of codes” or “breaks of rules”.

The errors that will be examined within the corpus of the study are as follows:

(i) Inappropriate use of wh words, verbs to-be, auxiliary verbs ‘have, has, had’ and ‘modals – can, have’ and ‘do’ verbs as the question words (lexical error).

(ii) Errors of fronting/inversion of the question word in each question (syntactic error).

Therefore, the examination of errors focuses on syntactical and lexical errors that are due to learners’ incompetence in the Target Language (TL). With regard to lexical error, many students use a familiar question word in an unfamiliar grammatical context or function. Thus, inappropriate question words are used. The error in ‘fronting’ is when the students fails to use a question word in initial position of the question. The errors committed reflect the true difficulty the students face in forming questions.
The following examples show various kinds of errors due to inappropriate use of question words, not inverting the subject with the auxiliary/question word and not 'fronting' the question word:

1. Example of inappropriate use of question word:
   * "Who cat was found in the drain?" instead of
     Whose cat was found in the drain?

2. Example of not 'fronting' the question word:
   * "A dentist will visit our school next month?" instead of
     Will a dentist visit our school next month?

In question 1, the error is when 'who' is used as a question word instead of 'whose' that shows a possessive or ownership.

In question 2, the error is because there is no 'fronting', i.e. 'a dentist' instead of 'will' is used as a question word that should be put in front of the question.

3.3.3 Error Classification

The classification of errors is carried out as follows:
(a) Section A: Form wh questions from the words underlined

A student's answer in the test is categorised as incorrect if the incorrect wh question word is used for the constituent being questioned. This type of error is classified as incorrect selection of lexical item. If the question word has not been fronted, then this will be classified as a syntactic error.

(b) Section B: Form yes/no questions using verbs to-be

A student's answer in the test is categorised as incorrect if the incorrect verb to-be word is used as the question word and the question word has not been fronted. In other words, when the verb to-be question word does not carry the correct tense of the question and/or does not agree with the subject of the question, then it is classified as using an incorrect question word. The question word must also be in initial position otherwise it will be classified as a syntactic error.
(c) Section C: Form yes/no questions using auxiliary verbs 'have, had, has, can, will'

A student's answer in the test is categorised as a lexical error if the incorrect auxiliary is used as the question word. This means that the verb must carry the correct tense of the question and it must also agree with the subject of the question. The correct auxiliary verb has to be placed in initial position of the question otherwise it will be categorised as a syntactic error.

(d) Section D: Form yes/no questions using 'do' verbs

A student's answer in the test is categorised as a lexical error if the incorrect 'do' verb is used in the question. It must also mark the tense of the question and agree with the subject. In addition, the 'do' verb has to be in initial position, otherwise it will be categorized as a syntactic error.

In contrastive study of interrogative structure in Arabic and English, Nazek Abdel Latif (1986) handled the classification of "error" according to their deviance from standard English usage as given in
grammar book", an approach adopted by other error analysts and the researcher in the study.

Mistakes or lapses are also commonly known as random errors, which are not the result of defects in the students competence. Any errors on semantic and other grammatical aspects are beyond the scope of this study and will not be included. Only systematic errors on syntactic and lexical competence in the Target Language (TL) in using appropriate question words, and fronting of these words will be looked at.

3.3.4 Error Explanation

This section will try to explain why students made errors in using the correct question word and in putting the question word in initial position of the question.

Possible sources of errors will be determined using the researcher's knowledge about L1 rule system, that is whether the errors are caused by intralingual or interlingual factors as well as other sources of errors.
Intralingual causes of errors are those caused by "mutual interference of items within the target language as well as strategies used by the students in their effort to acquire L2" (Kaur, 1996). Examples of such interferences are overgeneralization of structures and ignorance of restriction of grammar rules.

Interlingual causes of errors are those caused by intrusion of L1 (BM) where both L1 and L2 have contrasting grammar systems.

In addition, data from the questionnaire will be used to further explain the occurrence of the errors in terms of sociolinguistic factors.

3.5 Conclusion

The researcher, who is also an English master of the 205 students of Sekolah Menengah Ugama (Arab), Shamsul Maarif, Pulai Chondong, Machang Kelantan, faces difficulty in ensuring students to form questions correctly though they have been studying English for twelve years.

The students are supposed to have mastered the English grammar and tenses, but they have yet to acquire the expected 'competence' of their level.
The researcher is in the position to note that with their present acquired knowledge of English grammar and tenses, they may have difficulty in acquiring knowledge in general if no immediate remedial step is taken. Therefore, by identifying, classifying and explaining errors of these students, it would in some ways contribute to the efforts in helping these students acquire English effectively.