CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.0   Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology, sampling procedures, collection of data and materials used in the study.

3.1   The Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following research questions:

i) What are the different kinds of Tamil lexical items used in the English spoken by Malaysian Tamils in the domain of friendship?

ii) Why are different categories of Tamil lexical items used in the English spoken by Malaysian Tamil in the domain of friendship?

iii) What is the influence of the Tamil lexical items in the English spoken by the participants of this study?

3.2   The Research Methodology

The study takes into account the four main components of conducting a qualitative study outlined by Maxwell (1996: 65):

i) The research relationship between the researcher, and the participants of the study is taken into account.

ii) Sampling - the time, settings, or individual that are selected to be observed or interviewed, and the other sources of information that the researcher used are in line with Maxwell's guidelines.

iii) Data collection - the data is gathered from a wide range of subjects to aid the researcher in answering the research questions.

iv) Data analysis - the data is analysed carefully in order to obtain the most amount of quality information.

The research relationship plays an important role in the interaction between the researcher, the helpers, and the participants. Great importance was placed in the selection of the samples that included not only the participants, but also the selection of the appropriate recording and interviewing time, and settings. In addition, a detailed explanation on how the data was collected and analysed is also given in this chapter.

3.3 Tools of Analysis

In keeping with the traditions of ethnographic research, two main tools of inquiry were employed to provide the necessary data for the study. These include recorded English conversations and informal interviews of the subjects.

3.4 Sampling Procedures

Since the topic under investigation is related to the English-speaking Malaysian Tamils in the domain of friendship of three age groups, a purposive sampling procedure was adopted.

Careful consideration was given to the selection of the participants in order to get the most suitable subjects for the study. Some of the criteria for the selection of the participants are:

- <u>the age of the participants</u> - the researcher divided the age group of participants into three different groups as shown:

  i) 10 - 20 Years.

  ii) 21 - 49 Years.

  iii) 50 ≥ Years.

This was done in order to make the study more representative of the English-speaking Malaysian Tamils in the domain of friendship chosen for the study.

- <u>the type of education of the participants</u> - the researcher selected participants from both the Tamil-primary as well as non-Tamil primary schools, in order to obtain a high degree of reliability when assessing the level of mother tongue Tamil influence in their English conversations (Refer to 4.1).

- <u>the socio-economic level of the participants</u> - the researcher selected participants from white collar jobs such as factory workers, restaurant workers, businessmen, insurance agents, farmers, supermarket workers, as well as professionals such as teachers, lawyers and an engineer. The researcher also included retirees, students from primary and secondary schools, and university undergraduates, housewives, and people who are involved in religious activities such as a Hindu priest, and a yoga trainer.

The English conversations of the selected participants', to some extent, will indicate the influence of their mother tongue Tamil in their English conversations between their friends.

3.5   Non-Participant Observation

The researcher, as well as the assigned helpers also played the role of the non-participant observers while recording the conversations of the participants. This helped the researcher to understand better the linguistic behaviour of the Malaysian Tamils who speak English in the domain of friendship. This then, helped the researcher in gleaning insights and drawing conclusions as to why Tamil, as well as lexical items from other languages, are used in the English conversations of the participants in the study.

The helpers were instructed to use Standard English as much as possible. However, some of the helpers used some Malaysian English in the process of conducting their interviews. When questioned by the researcher, the helpers explained that they were not aware of that because it must have come "subconsciously" while they were conducting the interview. This may be because of the informal setting of the interviews and also the helpers and the interviewees were all friends. As thus, this explains why the helpers used Malaysian English in their interviews. However, this phenomenon did not affect the quality of the interviews (See Interview 1, 2 and 3).

In addition, the researcher as well as the assigned helpers also used neutral terms like "Oh, I see....", "And then...", "What else?", and other forms of prompting during the informal interviews to gather quality information.

3.6   Tape Recording

The researcher and the helpers used audio tape recorders to tape the conversations of the participants. All the participants were informed about the reasons of the recordings before the taping sessions. The audio tape recorders were

held as close as possible towards the friends who were talking. However, the tape recorders were placed on tables and on other suitable places when recordings were done in closed areas such as in rooms and in the houses of the participants.

In addition, the recordings of the conversations did not disrupt the flow of the conversations because automatic recorders were used. Thus, there was no need to reload the cassette recorder in-between the conversations. Also, 90-minute tapes were used and the length of the conversations did not exceed this time span.

3.7   The Helpers

The researcher gained entry into the different age groups with the assistance of helpers from the various age groups. The helpers were selected from different age groups because the participants in the respective age group were able to converse well among their peers.

A period of three months, prior to the study proper, was used in selecting the helpers from the various age groups. The researcher first spoke to the selected person about the purpose of the research. Only people who showed interest in handling tape recorders and in recording conversations were selected as helpers.

A total of 15 helpers were involved in the tape recording and interview sessions. Out of this number, 6 helpers were from the 10-20 Year Age Group. Another 5 helpers come from the 21-49 Year Age Group while the remaining 4 helpers helped the researcher with the 50 ≥ Year Age Group.

3.8   The Interviews

The interviews were conducted after the recording of each conversation. The researcher and the assigned helpers who played the role of silent participant observers during the recording of the conversation conducted the interviews. These informal interviews were based on the interview questions outlined in Appendix B. The informal interviews helped the researcher to obtain further insights in the process of answering the research questions.

3.9   The Interviewees

The criteria for the selection of the interviewees were based on the participants' flexibility and enthusiasm in conversing with their friends. The researcher and the helpers observed the participants during the taping sessions and selected a few of them for interviewing.

However, the other participants who wanted to participate in the interviews were also included so as to get the maximum amount of quality information regarding the use of Tamil lexical items in the English spoken by the participants.

3.10   Fieldwork Experience and Problems

The collection of data was done over a period of thirteen months in order to gather reliable and varied data. This is because the researcher had to select the participants for the three age groups and also choose the helpers from the participants. The helpers too, needed time to record their friends' English conversations because they had to make sure that all the participants were free at the time of the recordings.

The use of helpers proved invaluable to the study because they provided access into the different age groups. The participants of the 10-20 Year Age Group, for example, were quite reserved when the researcher attempted to record their conversation. These participants made conscious efforts to speak in their best English by correcting their pronunciation in their process of talking to their friends.

However, when helpers were selected among them to assist the researcher to record their conversations, this reserved linguistic behaviour changed. The participants then, were less self-conscious to their friends. Thus, in this way quality information was gathered in answering the research questions formulated in Chapter III of this study.

A problem faced by the researcher as well as the helpers, at the initial stages of the tape recording was the misconception about the idea of recording voices. The misconception that their voices may be used in "unwanted activities" such as their voices being heard by unwanted people put off nine people from taking part in the recording sessions. These included two lab assistants from two secondary schools, an office worker, and three housewives. Another three factory workers refused to take part because they felt that their English was not good enough. The three factory workers claimed that their pronunciation was bad. Besides the fear of recording their "bad" English and poor pronunciation, other reasons, such as the fear of "charms" were also cited as excuses.

The three factory workers who refused to take part in the recording also explained that great harm could happen to them in the form of accidents, illness, and bad luck if "unwanted people" get hold of their "voice" or other personal belongings such as their clothes. According to the factory workers, these "unwanted people"

may get the help of a "bomoh" (shaman) in order to caste a spell on them, amongst others, via their "voice", clothes, and other personal items belonging to them.

Difficulties were also encountered in following the flow of some of the conversations recorded by the helpers. This is due to the fact that all the participants who took part in the conversations are friends in their respective groups. Thus, they took the liberty to enter and leave the recording sessions as they liked. This phenomenon posed problems to the researcher while transcribing the recorded conversations and the researcher had to re-listen to the conversations to make sure who left the group, and who entered into the recording sessions. However, this phenomenon could not be avoided because the participants had the choice and freedom of talking on any topic that they wanted to discuss. In fact, this kind of behaviour is typical to the people who are in the domain of friendship. However, this problem did not affect the quality of the data for the study.

In the case of the recording of conversations in public places and in other noisy places such as in restaurants, holiday resorts, and bus stops, notes were also taken. The researcher as well as the helpers had to take notes and observe the participants closely, so as not to miss any details that may not be clearly heard in the recorded conversations. This technique proved invaluable in the tracing of the Tamil lexical items used in the English conversations of the participants.

3.11   The Transcriptions

The researcher transcribed all the recorded conversations and 4 out of the 8 interviews that were conducted (See Appendix C and Appendix D). However, all other relevant information from the rest of the interviews is included in Chapter IV of this study. The actual names of the participants are withheld to ensure privacy.

The following steps were taken in the process of analyzing and transcribing the recorded conversations and interviews of the participants of this study:

3.11.1   Tamil Lexical Items

First the researcher repeatedly listened to the recorded English conversations of the participants according to the age groups, and identified the Tamil lexical items used in the conversations. Then the Tamil lexical items were sorted out according to words, expressions, and idioms. Next, the researcher listened to the conversations again and analysed why the Tamil lexical items were used in the English spoken by the participants of the study. These lexical items were then quoted as excerpts in Chapter IV. The researcher also Romanized the Tamil used by the participants for the sake of clarity. The English meaning of the Tamil used is given for clarity, and as a guide to readers who are not familiar with the Tamil language.

3.12   Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the research questions, and the research methodology used in this study. The tools of analysis, the sampling procedures and the fieldwork experience and problems were also discussed in detail. The process of analysing the data is also discussed. Chapter IV will give a detailed analysis of the data, in an attempt to answer the research questions of the study.