CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.0 Introduction

This chapter looks into how the research was carried out. It goes on to give an explanation of how and why the subjects were chosen and the task involved in carrying out the research.

Jacob (1987) emphasises that in order for the data collected to be representative of the natural behaviour of the members of the community, various kinds of methodologies have to be adopted. Since this study is more concerned with the insiders’ perspectives, less intrusive data collecting methods with very little or no manipulation from the researcher have to be devised.

Data for this study, is collected by observing, conducting semi-structured and informal interviews and distributing questionnaires to respondents of varying ages, sex and socio-economic backgrounds. However, it has to be mentioned that the ethnographic approach adopted for this study does lean heavily on one type of method, that is, the observation method. It is hoped that the findings obtained from different data collecting methods reflect the quality of the data in terms of reliability, validity and representativeness.
4.1 Techniques used in Data Collection

According to Fetterman (1989), triangulation is very basic in ethnographic research. He indicates that in triangulation, the researcher has to compare one source of information against another since it is the core of ethnographic validity. The methods, which are selected, are those that will provide the data required for producing a more complete piece of research work.

4.1.1 Observation

The researcher spent a period of two years (1998-1999) observing. Within this period she attempted to study the language spoken by the Punjabi ethnic community in the urban area of Kuala Lumpur in different natural settings. She kept written notes after each session. These notes were recorded and analysed to derive specific patterns of use of English and Punjabi within these members of the Punjabi Ethnic group.

The main advantage of using observation is that it allows the researcher to study the phenomenon at close range. An observation of the Kuala Lumpur Punjabi community was conducted, with the objective being to study, who was speaking what language, and to whom, and under what circumstances, to enable the researcher to determine the extent of use of the English language compared to the ethnic language. Such observation was facilitated by the fact that the Punjabi community is a very close knit community, and that the researcher is a member of the community. There is very close relationship between members of the community despite the fact that they have different religious beliefs (some are
Hindus and others Sikhs). They usually meet regularly in temples, homes and at social functions. The researcher was able to sit and observe interactions between various generations of Punjabis at occasions like weddings, religious functions, kitty parties (ladies gathering), birthdays and funerals. These observations enabled the researcher to be evaluative and critical in the analysis of the data collected.

4.1.2 Interviews

Besides observation, the researcher also conducted semi-structured (Appendix E) and informal interviews to validate findings. The semi-structured interviews were conducted among 20 adults and 20 schoolchildren respondents but only selected interviews from social and religious domain have been attached. The aim of the interviews was to explain and put into a larger context what the researcher saw and experienced. Informal interviews of various members of the community were carried out throughout the observation period. The interviews were carried out in religious (Appendix A- interviews 1, 2 and 3) and social domains (Appendix B- interviews 1, 2 and 3).

Spradly (1979) emphasised the similarities between informal conversations and ethnographic interviews. They are the opposite of a carefully planned out and preordained set of questions that speech members have to answer. Similarly, this study did not involve specific type or order of questions. The interviews were composed of questions, which did not have predetermined response alternatives. The informal interviews contained general questions such as the length of time they had stayed in Malaysia, reasons why they migrated, their
views regarding English education. They progressed as the conversation did, following the turns of the participants or the researcher’s interest.

In some instances, questions were asked by the researcher, in response to comments made by the participants. This approach was applied to solicit information that could not be gleaned from mere observation. For instance, the researcher wanted to discover what the participants were actually thinking of and how, one person’s perceptions compared to another’s. These comparisons helped to identify shared values, to discover more of what the respondents had stated in the questionnaires. All this helped to clarify ambiguities.

4.1.3 Questionnaires

The primary aim of the questionnaires was to supplement the observation. Like the interviews, it was used to supply information that could not be gleaned from mere observation. However, compared to the interviews, questionnaires were a quicker way of collecting certain types of information such as the background of the participants and activities that necessitate the use of English.

Two sets of questionnaires eliciting language use data were distributed to the various socio-economic sectors of the Punjabi community. One set was distributed to adults made up of 70 professionals and businesspeople comprising both men and women but only 50 were returned. The aim of the questionnaire study was to obtain information on the English language competence, code choice and the attitude of the adult Punjabi speech community towards English.
The second set of questionnaires was given to 60 schoolchildren comprising an equal number of boys and girls but only 50 were returned. The questionnaires, distributed to youngsters from various socio-economic backgrounds, aimed to elicit information, which shows the extent of the use of English and Punjabi among the young members.

The subjects were asked to answer the questions to the best of their ability and also to inform of their willingness to take part in a face to face interview. The interviews were carried out to find out their level of fluency in the English language.

For the first set (Table 3, Page 38), the professional and business groups were selected to represent the adult Punjabi ethnic group in the urban areas. This group comprises of young educated class of people, known to the researcher. Observation and interviews with this group show that this group is suitable for the study, as the members belong to the higher strata of the socio-economic status. Observations indicate that they have a great tendency to use the English language as the first language in most domains of their life. This study does not aim to identify the non-professionals in the urban areas, that is the blue-collar workers.

For the second set of questionnaires which were distributed to school children aged below 19 years, 50 were returned but only 40 of the questionnaires returned could be used for the study as the other 10 returned were classified unusable. (These had been damaged by nonsensical responses and therefore were discarded). This young school going group represents the third generation in the
study and the elicited information is used to show the growing role and importance of the English language through their language choice and speech competence. Interviews were carried out during various social gatherings in the temples to obtain data on the use and status of the English language.

The table below shows the profile of both the groups selected for the questionnaires.

**Table 3. Profile of respondents**

**The Professional and Business Group (Adult group)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generation A</td>
<td>36-55 years of age</td>
<td>25 respondents comprising 13 males and 12 females</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation B</td>
<td>20-35 years of age</td>
<td>25 respondents comprising 12 males and 13 females</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**School Children (The young group)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>12-14 years of age</td>
<td>9 respondents comprising 4 males and 5 females.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>15-19 years of age</td>
<td>31 respondents comprising 16 males and 15 females.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There was a constraint in getting to the older generation (60 years over), who were direct migrants from India, as many of them were unable to read and write in English and therefore unable to do the questionnaire. Members of this group were not included as subjects for the study.

4.2 Description of Sample

This study is carried out in the urban areas of mostly Kuala Lumpur and partially Malacca and Ipoh. Kuala Lumpur is selected for two reasons. Firstly, it is convenient for the researcher due to the constraints of cost and time involved in conducting fieldwork among the rural people, as they are scattered in very small numbers all over Malaysia. According to records in places of worship, one can find only a few families scattered in each little town or village around Malaysia. It is therefore more practical to do the study in the urban areas mentioned above where there is a high density of this ethnic group and the researcher has easy access.

Secondly, it was felt that the urban population would be more suitable for study as according to Citavelu (1985), the urban dwellers place a greater importance on the English language than the rural people who stress more on the national language of Bahasa Malaysia. This study does not include the rural people because their exposure to the English language is lesser compared to the urban dwellers.
4.2.1 First Group of Respondents (adults)

The first group of professional and business people comprise of lawyers, doctors, bankers, teachers, civil servants, textile dealers and tour agents. The researcher divides them into two groups. The first sub group, which will be known as generation A, is made up of respondents between 36 to 55 years of age. The second group, which is known as generation B, comprises those from the age of 20 to 35 years. The older generation (Gen. A) is made of members whose parents are direct migrants while the majority of the younger group (Gen. B) is made up of those whose parents are born in Malaysia.

To make sure there is fair representation from both genders, the study breaks up each of the two groups of respondents according to gender.

Table 4. First Group of Respondents (50 samples responded)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generation A</td>
<td>36-55</td>
<td>13 (26%)</td>
<td>12 (24%)</td>
<td>25 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation B</td>
<td>20-35</td>
<td>12 (24%)</td>
<td>13 (26%)</td>
<td>25 (50%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 shows that the first group has been subdivided into two generations according to age and each sub division is further divided according to gender. The subdivision has an equal number of men and women to ensure a balanced sample, so that the views expressed in the survey would represent all sectors of the
Punjabi population. It has selected subjects equally from both genders so that the findings are not gender biased. However, for this first group, the study will not be looking at the responses according to the different genders but according to the different age groups.

4.2.2 Second Group of Respondents (schoolchildren)

The second group is made up of youngsters, between the ages of 12 and 19 years. They are all from the urban area of Kuala Lumpur, found in small numbers distributed throughout the 260 schools in this city. A few questionnaires were distributed in the temple during the weekly youth programs. To get a sample of children from different socio-economic background, the remaining questionnaires were distributed to selected people known to the researcher. The second group of respondents is the one, which will determine the present and future role and status of English and the survival of the mother tongue in the Punjabi community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>4 (10%)</td>
<td>5 (12%)</td>
<td>9 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>16 (40%)</td>
<td>15 (38%)</td>
<td>31 (78%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The study divided this group into two according to age as well as gender, as seen in table 5. This was to differentiate the reactions and attitudes of this young generation according to age and gender. Gender division among this group is stressed as the researcher found from the responses, that age did not differentiate the kind of response but gender did. Furthermore, the 10 questionnaires that had to be discarded came from the group between 12-14 years of age, making its representation very minor.

Gender response in the second group is important to enable the study to formulate a hypothesis regarding the future of the mother tongue and the English language among the Bahasa Malaysia educated Punjabi community in Malaysia.

4.3 Development of Questionnaire

The early stages of developing the questionnaire involved talks with the various generations, unstructured interviews and observation during intracommunal gatherings. The questions were worded, structured and organised as a coherent whole.

4.3.1 Description of First Set

The first questionnaire, which is intended for the adults belonging to the professional and business group (Appendix D-set 1), is made up of 28 questions. The intention is to get a general overview of respondents' use, attitude and proficiency in the English language and the Punjabi language. It is mainly a close-ended questionnaire with four open-ended questions. The minimal number of
open-ended questions was to encourage and facilitate free response so that each respondent is able to convey his feelings on the importance of the English language.

The first five questions deal with socio-demographic variables such as age, gender and levels of education of the professional and business group. This will provide sufficient information to enable the researcher to make the division of the sample into the two generations. Questions 6 and 7 are to find out where they received their education and the medium of instruction in school.

Questions 8 and 9 attempt to find out if the respondents learnt the ethnic language during childhood and whether the mother tongue is still being spoken by the individual. This will indicate if the mother tongue, which is learnt from family members in the home domain during the childhood period, is able to survive in a multilingual environment. It will help show how many of the respondents are able to speak their mother tongue at present and enable the study to make an assumption about the main language spoken by the Punjabi community.

Question 10 attempts to find out the main language spoken by the community. This is followed by question 11, which is to identify the ability of the Punjabis to express their intentions in the English language, in case the main language spoken is not English. This question will help the study to ascertain the fact that the majority speaks the English language and also the level of perceived proficiency of the respondents in the language. Together with information from other means, it will enable the study to come to a conclusion on whether the
respondents are able to speak English fluently, with difficulty or do they just speak 'bazaar' English.

Question 12 intends to find out the language used in intracommunity communication in activities at work and social domains. This data will show if the language used by individuals in various activities is English. It will enable the study to establish if English is important in most of the domains, even at intracommunity level.

Question 13 asks about the family background of the respondent. It is followed by question 14 which is intended to find out the main language used in the home domain. These two questions will be able to elicit information, which will show if the people who use the English language in the home domain come from nuclear or extended families. The type of family background will enable the study to find out the importance of the role of interlocutors in promoting the language shift to English. From the data showing the use of either the mother tongue or English language, the study will be able to establish how extreme is the role of English in the home domain of the Punjabi community.

Question 15 attempts to find out the literacy level of the community in the various languages found in Malaysia. The findings would show the number of people able to read and write the Punjabi language. It will enable the study to form a conclusion regarding the importance of the English language in the life of this ethnic minority. Question 16 inquires after the reading materials of the different languages used by the literate. This will help clarify what percentage of the community is literate in the mother tongue, and if those literate, read materials
only in the mother tongue or also in English. It will help the study to find out whether the preferred language in the selection of reading material is English.

Question 17 is to find out if there is any code switching when the respondents try to speak in the mother tongue to their Punjabi peers, while question 18 will inform us of the language or languages used in the code switching process. It will enable the study to hypothesize on the level of proficiency in the English language, as it enables the respondents to switch to it for a quick response, when lost for words in the mother tongue. The study assumes that the large amounts of codeswitching indicate a drop in the level of proficiency of the ethnic language and an increase in the use of other languages such as the English language. The respondents, probably unable to find the proper vocabulary or the appropriate register in the Punjabi language, switch to English, the main language spoken by them. The accompanying open-ended question will enable the study to find out the specific reasons for the codeswitching among the respondents.

Questions 19 and 21 are to find out if the English language plays an important role in the different domains of the life of the Punjabi ethnic group. Question 19 touches on the religious domain and will enable the study to draw conclusions regarding the main language used by an individual in the religious domain. Questions 20 and 21 try to find out if English is the predominant language in the domain of entertainment. It will be able to find out the language which is preferred during entertainment, such as when watching movies and
listening to songs and the open-ended question following question 19 will provide some of the reasons for the language preference.

Question 22 and 23 are to find out the attitude towards the learning of the English language, in order to establish the importance of the English language to the Punjabi community. It also provides a choice of possible reasons for the preference of the English language. Question 24 is to find out the medium of instruction preferred in schools. The open-ended question will help to explain the reasons for the language choice among the Punjabis and indirectly this will enable the study to hypothesise on some of the possible reasons leading to a language shift to English among this ethnic group.

Question 25 probes further to find out their views on the English language becoming the first language of the Punjabi community. The open-ended question following it enables the respondents to provide the possible reasons why the community feels that English has become the first language of their children.

To find out the extent of interest shown by the Punjabi community in learning English and the reasons why they feel learning this language is important. Question 26 aims to get to the importance advocated to English by the Punjabi community. It does so by finding out the attitude of the respondents, on the subject of their children learning the mother tongue. Question 27 will indicate the usefulness of the mother tongue in their daily life. The response to this question will provide one of the many reasons for the language shift to English.
Question 28 elicits information regarding the position of English in the
heirarchy of languages in existence in Malaysia. It enables the Punjabi community
to indicate their language preference and provide reasons for their choice.

4.3.2 Description of Second Set

The second questionnaire (Appendix D- set 2) is made up of 11 simple
questions with three of them being open-ended to provide a wider scope of
response. It is a straightforward questionnaire meant for those between 12-19
years of age. The intention of this questionnaire is to get data to prove that a
language shift has occurred among the third generation. The questions are mostly
aimed at trying to get information on the ability of this young generation to use
English as against the inability to use the mother tongue. The responses will go
towards proving that a language shift to English has occurred. The two final
questions will support the importance given to the English language by the
young members of the Punjabi community.

Questions 1 and 2 are meant to inquire about the ability of the young
respondents to speak English as compared to the mother tongue. This is to enable
the study to find out the percentage of respondents unable to speak the mother
tongue but able to speak English. If there were a lower percentage able to speak
the mother tongue compared to those able to speak the English language, it
would imply that a language shift to English has taken place. In addition, it tries
to find the perceived level of fluency of the English language compared to the
mother tongue.
Question 3 is to find out about the rate of literacy of the respondents in the English and the Punjabi language. This, with the support of information from temple schoolteachers, will indicate the number of children among the respondents who are literate in Punjabi but are unable to speak in the mother tongue. In contrast, for the English language all those who are literate in English are able to speak it and even many who are illiterate in English are able to speak this language. This would go to show the importance advocated to the English language.

Question 4 and 5 inquire about the language used to speak to friends and teachers and other members of the same ethnic group in the social domain. It will show the major language used in intracommunity communication. Question 6 looks at the main language used in the home domain. The use of English in both the social and home domain will provide evidence of a shift to the English language among the young generation of the Punjabi community.

Question 7 tries to look into their desire in the educational domain. The study will be able to gather data on the medium of education preferred by this young group. The open-ended question following this allows the young creative minds to provide a variety of personal and unusual reasons, which the researcher may not have listed down in the questionnaire.

Question 8 intends to find out about the usefulness of the Punjabi and English language in the daily lives of these young respondents. This response will provide a reason for the language shift from Punjabi to English. Question 9 is meant to find out the frequency of use of the English language. A high frequency
goes to prove that the majority of the young generation is using the English language most of the time. Question 10 tries to identify the particular areas in which the respondents find the English language to be useful.

The final question is to find out the language of preference among the young members of the Punjabi community and the reasons for their desire. The choice made will enable the study to evaluate the value placed on the English language. The open-ended part of the question will enable the young members to provide possible reasons for the desires of the young group regarding language choice.

4.4 Collection of Data

After the research proposal was submitted for approval, the researcher approached the temples (Guru-Dwaras and Mandhir) requesting permission and cooperation to administer the questionnaire to the students through the weekly youth programs. The young generation normally meets at these temples once a week during the youth program. As the Punjabi students are scattered in small numbers in many schools all over Kuala Lumpur, this was one easy way to get them together in order to distribute and collect the questionnaires.

On the other hand, the professionals and businesspeople who did the questionnaires and volunteered for the interviews were mostly people known to the researcher. Subjects were very enthusiastic and there was plenty of communal co-operation. The questionnaires were distributed individually and the respondents were given one week to fill them and then they were collected by the researcher with the help of a few members of this ethnic community. According
to Putz (1992) some difficulties associated with data collection are obvious. In the case of this study, although the researcher distributed approximately 130 questionnaires to both the groups, many did not return them and others were damaged. The damaged ones were especially among those distributed to children from ages 12-14 in the second group.

The research data of this study will be used to find out if a language shift has taken place, in which domains of the life of the Punjabis has it become very important and what is the status given by this ethnic group to the English language.