CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AREA

1.1 Introduction

Teaching is an interactive process that takes place primarily between a teacher and a group of pupils. In this process, much of the interaction may be controlled by the teacher, where the teacher plays the important role of controlling the direction and flow of knowledge and information.

The success of teaching, in whatever the subject taught, does not merely depend on the implementation of effective methodology. However, it will never be sufficient for a lesson to be effective just by having different stages in it. A powerful way of enhancing learning is to device situations which require more student interaction with teachers (Newble and Cannon, 1989). This implies that situations for interaction have to be created and in creating them, a teacher has to be competent in using instructional language. It is this instructional language that acts as a tool in translating a particular method into action in any teaching-learning process.

The Education Ministry is aware of the importance of instructional language as it is clearly stipulated as an integral part of the English language syllabus for
Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) trainees, KP (BPG)/9577/119, June 1993, produced by the Teacher Education Division, Ministry of Education, Malaysia. The syllabus, for the TESL course for Semesters 2, 3 and 4 clearly includes instructional language as one of the areas to be taught. Where instructional language is concerned, the following objectives are given for the semesters mentioned above:

Semester 2:
- To enable students to use **instructional language** with emphasis on effectively phrased questions.

Semester 3:
- To enable students to use appropriate **instructional language** in the classroom.

Semester 4:
- To enable students to consolidate the use of **instructional language** for effective classroom use.

The importance of instructional language has been further emphasized by the Ministry by assigning it as a topic to be focused on in the process based coursework of Semester 3 TESL trainees. The TESL syllabus prior to this syllabus which was used in the 1980's did not have a component on instructional
language. There was no awareness of the importance of instructional language because no research studies had been done on the subject. Furthermore the teacher trainees who came for training had a better command of the language than the later batches and hence this area was not considered as important in the training of a TESL teacher.

In the 1990's the teacher trainees who entered college had a lower proficiency level of English and were making more errors while conducting a lesson. Hence to overcome the present problems, instructional language was included. As a teacher trainer since 1983, the researcher believes that the inclusion of instructional language has been quite effective in terms of enhancing the teacher language of the teacher trainees. However, there are some current short comings which will be revealed by this study.

1.2 The Problem

Based on the researcher’s experience as a teacher educator for twenty years in Maktab Perguruan Kota Bharu, it can be safely said that in language teaching and learning, in order to translate methodological knowledge into classroom practice, all teachers must acquire a certain level of instructional language competence.

*It is, however, often forgotten that the classroom procedures derived from a particular method almost invariably have to be verbalized. In other words, instructions have to be given, groups formed, time limits set, questions asked, answers confirmed, discipline maintained and so on. The role of this linguistic interaction is perhaps one of the least understood aspects of teaching, but it is clearly crucial to the success of the teaching/learning event (p.5)*

Whilst observing teacher trainees during their practical teaching, the researcher has found that they often failed to use the most effective types of instructional language as compared to experienced teachers. The teaching of English as a second language in our country has undergone different approaches over the years. English language teachers have applied the structural, and structural situational approaches. With the introduction of the integrated curriculum in schools the approach used to teach English has been communicative.

One of the principles of the communicative approach in language teaching, is to be pupil-centered. This means that the teaching-learning process should focus on the pupils using the language more than the teachers and pupils using the language in simulated situations resembling real-life situations they may encounter. Thus the role of the teacher is that of a facilitator who encourages learning as opposed to the dominant role in the traditional teacher-centred approach in language teaching.
The teacher trainees have been exposed to instructional language during the theoretical aspect of their training. Whether they have really acquired the correct usage of instructional language will be observed during their teaching practice. It is then that they have to put to good use what they have learnt. The core of the problem is that many teacher trainees have not internalized instructional language effectively. For example many have been found to concentrate on one or two categories of instructional language and neglect the use of others sufficiently. This could be partly due to their lack of competence in using instructional language or their lack of awareness of the connection between certain categories of teacher language and facilitation of pupil-centered activities in a communicative lesson.

Therefore, it is felt that more research is necessary in this area. A random group of TESL teacher trainees who were on teaching practice, were chosen as respondents for this study. Their instructional language was compared to that of a group of in-service teachers to find out how the two groups differ in the quantity and quality of instructional language used.

1.3 Rationale

In order for language teachers to acquire the skilful use of instructional language there has to be sufficient research findings on instructional language made available for language teachers. In addition, it is the onus of language planners,
applied linguists, teacher educators and researchers to keep abreast of research findings to address this dire need.

However, there has been a dearth of research in this area, especially in the local context. The first local study on classroom interaction by Arfah Abdul Aziz (1977) examined communication strategies used in Malay-medium classes. Following this, Moses Samuel (1982) examined questioning strategies used by teachers and pupils in upper secondary English language classrooms. He has focused his research on only one of the functions of teacher language.

Mah Sow Wei (1983) identified discourse functions in reading comprehension lessons of teacher trainees along the lines of Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). The data was gleaned from lessons which reflected a rather technical and teacher-centred approach. Devikamani (1991) studied on the quantity and quality of teacher language used by pre-service and in-service teachers in lower secondary schools. She analyzed the teacher language by simultaneously using three sets of categories: the researcher’s categories of meta language, Stubbs’ classification of meta communicative functions and Bowers’ categories of verbal behaviour.

In brief, there have been no studies focusing on both the teacher’s use of different categories of language in pupil-centred primary English language classrooms as well as the errors made by these teachers. Therefore, it is anticipated that the findings of this study will contribute to the development of research on
instructional language in the language classroom. Indirectly, it may provide some guidance for English language teachers in understanding the roles of the teacher in the current curriculum and for teacher educators to focus on the essential aspects of instructional language in their teacher education lectures.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are as follows:

1.4.1 Firstly, to examine the frequency of use of different discourse categories of instructional language by the TESL teacher trainees and in-service teachers in their 30 minute teaching sessions.

1.4.2 Secondly, to find out whether there is a difference in the overall number of utterances with errors between the TESL teacher trainees and in-service teachers.

1.4.3 Thirdly, to examine whether there are differences in the quantity of utterances with errors made in each category of instructional language by the TESL teacher trainees and in-service teachers.
1.5 Research questions

This study explores the following research questions:

a) Is there a difference in the overall number of utterances between TESL teacher trainees and in-service teachers in the use of instructional language?

b) Is there a difference in the mean number of utterances between TESL teacher trainees and in-service teachers in each of the following categories of instructional language: to direct learning, to encourage/praise pupils, to indicate disapproval/misbehaviour, to ask questions and to rephrase and respond to questions?

c) Is there a difference in the overall number of utterances with errors between TESL trainees and in-service teachers?

d) Is there a difference in the mean number of utterances with errors between TESL trainees and in-service teachers in each of the following categories of instructional language: to direct learning, to encourage/praise pupils, to indicate disapproval/misbehaviour, to ask questions and to rephrase and respond to questions?

1.6 Significance of the study

Devikamani (1991) conducted a study on the language used by teachers in the lower secondary classroom to determine whether pre-service teachers differed from in-service teachers in terms of the quantity and quality of teacher language
utilized in the language classroom. It was observed that the pre-service teachers utilized a significantly larger quantity of teacher language than the in-service teachers. They also used higher percentages for categories that involve the organizing of the content of the lesson and lower percentages for categories involving verbal control of pupil language and direct presentation of lesson content. This was the reverse in the case of the pre-service teachers.

The researcher's study on teacher language is different from the study conducted by Devikamani. Her study looked at Stubbs' and Bowers' categories and came up with new categories as well. The researcher has merely used the five categories of instructional language as stipulated in the teacher training syllabus for his analysis. Her study looked at the lower secondary school language teachers while the researcher focuses on primary school language teachers. She did not look at the quantity of errors committed by both groups. The researcher has included the study of teacher errors. This has been done because the falling standards of language accuracy among teachers can have serious repercussions on the standard of English among students as TESL teachers will then be poor role models for their students to emulate.

The similarity of Devikamani's study with the researcher's study is in the comparison of the meta language used by experienced and inexperienced subjects, and in the focus on teacher language alone, rather than on pupil language as well.
Devikamani has recommended that instructional language should be included in the teacher training syllabus. This topic is to be given prominence and be taught in a formal and organized way. This is also due to the fact that the standard of English among teacher trainees is deteriorating. Many teacher trainees with only a weak credit of SPM 5 or 6 are now accepted into teacher training colleges to do the TESL course of study. Perhaps in response to such recommendation the Teacher Education Division has included the teaching of instructional language in the English language syllabus for the TESL course, KP (BPG)/9577/119 June 1993. Hence the current study will be a follow-up study which will be of use to different groups of people involved in the teaching of English as a second language. They are as follows:

1.6.1 Teachers

Some teachers are rather apprehensive when conducting a lesson due to their lack of competence or lack of experience in using instructional language. Hence this study will direct their attention to the effective use of instructional language and how other teachers are using them in the classrooms. In fact, any study on instructional language would be of interest to teachers as the findings would enable them to take another look at language which they may have taken for granted, but which requires deeper analysis, if the teacher is to understand his roles in the communicative ESL classroom.
1.6.2 Teacher Trainees

The findings of this study may be particularly useful to pre-service teachers, as to-date, few studies have been done at the tertiary level, focusing on the use of instructional language by teachers in the communicative classroom.

1.6.3 Teacher Educators

Instructional language has been a compulsory topic in the teacher training syllabus since 1993. This study will reveal to the teacher educators how teacher trainees differ from trained teachers in the different categories of instructional language used. This will enable them to focus and emphasize on the categories of instructional language which are often neglected in the language classroom. In a survey conducted at a teacher-training college more than 80% of the in-service teachers requested for more hours of English proficiency focusing on speech training, so that they can upgrade their skills in spoken English (Devikamani, 1988). This shows that even the experienced teachers feel a need to upgrade their own teacher language in the language classroom.

1.6.4 Syllabus Reviewers

This study should be of interest to those who have to review the teacher education syllabuses from time to time for the training or re-training of ESL teachers.

Since the inclusion of instructional language in the TESL syllabus in 1993, there are some shortcomings that the researcher perceives as a teacher educator. The
teacher trainees have been observed to use only certain categories of instructional language during their teaching practice. The distribution of the categories has been lopsided. Many teacher educators who observe the teacher trainees during the teaching practice are of the opinion that the trainees tend to use a lot of instructional language based on one or two categories, such as 'To direct learning' using mainly imperatives and statements.

There is a need for this study to show if the above observation by the teacher educators is true. Furthermore it is to recommend to the Ministry of Education ways of addressing this problem faced by trainees of mainly using one or two categories of instructional language rather than using appropriately all the different categories. Hence this study intends to highlight the use of all five categories of instructional language needed for more effective teaching-learning activities and classroom management.

1.7 Limitations of the study

The limitation of this study is that it is not an exploratory study but a follow up one. The researcher has also limited the categories of the instructional language to those stipulated in the teacher training syllabus and has not re-explored other finer sub-categories. This has been done purposely to avoid other variables which may interfere with the topic on instructional language as stipulated and explained in the TESL syllabus. The syllabus has defined and explained a set of five categories
and the researcher has deemed it necessary to stick to the five categories so that he could make a valid and reliable observation of instructional language as used by teacher trainees and in-service teachers. He can then compare them to that found in the TESL syllabus. This will enable the researcher to focus on certain topics based on the teacher training syllabus in terms of adequacy of time and nature of efficacy for actual classroom management.

This study is based on an analysis of instructional language used by the pre-service and in-service teachers. Although it is limited in scope, the researcher believes that the findings will support the relevance of this component in the teacher training syllabus and reveal much about the usage of instructional language for classroom management in the ESL classroom.