

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The IRC is becoming a fad among Malaysian Internet users to chat with other users from all over Malaysia. This new IRC culture has created a group of multiracial youngsters speaking the same lingo, and who have become fast friends. Thus, it is important for IRC chatters to understand the language conventions, code-switching patterns, and the communicative purpose of these patterns while chatting. Furthermore, having knowledge about the openings and closings of the chat will probably reduce confusion among the IRC chatters. Therefore, the aim of this study is to undertake an analysis of local IRC in terms of its language conventions, code-switching patterns and its communicative purposes. The researcher will also attempt to analyse the structure of openings and closings of the chat.

3.2 Instruments

This study used two instruments:

- i. the IRC extracts
- ii. the questionnaire

3.2.1 The IRC Extracts

The IRC extracts refer to the chat scripts that were downloaded form a channel in the IRC. Initially, ten hours of chat from ten extracts which comprised 184 participants were downloaded from the #mamak channel. From the ten broad extracts, six extracts of six hours of chat comprising 55 participants were chosen to be analysed in this study. The choice of each extract was based on the following criteria:

- i. the extracts were fully developed within an hour
- ii. the extracts involved at least twenty turns

Table 1 shows the total number of participants of the six extracts.

Table 1: Total Number of Participants for Each Extract

Extract Number	
	Number of Participants
1	10
2	12
3	7
4	13
5	5
6	6
Total	55

The topics were not specified or fixed by the participants. The participants started the topic and participants who were interested joined in the conversation. The participants were anonymous to each other but they identified themselves by

nicknames. They typed their nicknames as soon as they joined the channel. For example, <LiLPoP>, <bluf>, <Honkan>, and etc. They even changed their nicknames in the middle of the conversation but, this did not create confusion as the changing of nicknames was informed to others by the given status of participants. Given status of a participant is an automated signal by the server to show firstly, the changing of nicknames by the participants and secondly, who joined and left the chat. For example, *moonwalk (blink@j59.bkr 31.jarring.my) has joined #mamak* (See Appendix C-1 in page 113) or **** Janker is now known as Beckham* (See Appendix C-1 in page 114).

3.2.2 The Questionnaire

A questionnaire was prepared to substantiate the findings on the language conventions and code-switching patterns during chat. 100 questionnaires were distributed to 100 undergraduates who are learning English for Specific Purposes in University of Malaya. They were from five different faculties in University of Malaya. The faculties involved were:

- i. Computer Science
- ii. Science
- iii. Engineering
- iv. Business Studies
- v. Language and Linguistics

The researcher designed a questionnaire comprising 11 questions. (Refer to Appendix D). The first purpose of distributing the questionnaire was to determine the correlation between the type of users (experienced or newbies) and the language conventions used (Questions 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10). The second purpose was to ascertain the language used by different races to chat in the Malaysian IRC (Questions 2 and 7).

3.3 Data Collection

The researcher used four essential computer devices to obtain IRC extracts from the Mamak channel:

- i. external modem by ThunderCom
- ii. 14" computer
- iii. Verbatim diskette
- iv. BJC-210SP printer

The external modem functions as a connector to the Internet where the conversation took place. Without the modem, it was impossible to obtain the data because connection between the Internet and researcher were unavailable. The computer, on the other hand, played the role as a screen that displayed typed conversation of all participants and as a conversation setting. All the conversations were saved in a Verbatim diskette. It played the role similar to a tape-recorder that records all spoken conversation. Then, the BJC-210SP color

bubble jet printer was used to print the extracts. Thus, these tools are important and sufficient to obtain the data for this study.

The researcher also used the grammar and spelling checker from the computer program to detect irregular typographies such as simplified and multiplied punctuations, extension and simplified spellings, and missing capitalization; thus allowing the researcher to count them and categorize them accordingly. This is to enable the researcher to analyse the language conventions used by the IRC participants.

The following explains the processes of collecting data: the IRC extracts and questionnaire for the analysis of this study.

3.3.1 The IRC Extracts

To obtain each extract, the researcher first connected to an IRC server. Then, a channel folder that holds a list of channels appeared and the researcher chose the #mamak channel to chat by clicking the Join button. Moments later, the #mamak window opened indicating that the researcher had joined in the chat. Thus, the chat began when a message was typed and the enter key was pressed. The researcher participated in the conversation for one hour in every session. The message was sent to the #mamak channel and everyone on the channel could see it. At the end of the session, when the researcher wanted to leave, she clicked the

close button. Finally, the conversations were saved in a diskette. This process is schematically presented in Figure 4.

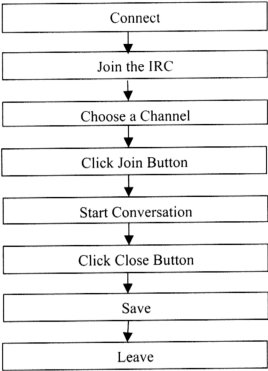


Figure 4: Data Collection Process

For this study, the researcher collected ten extracts from the Mamak channel during a period of five consecutive months: June, July, August, September, October, and November. Only six extracts were chosen for this study based on the criteria as cited in page 34. These six extracts were numbered chronologically based on the date the researcher logged in. The researcher then assigned a topic based on the content of the chat. The date on the extract

indicated the date the researcher logged in the #mamak channel. As for the time, it showed the time the researcher joined and left the conversation. See Table 2.

Table 2: Login Timetable

Extract No	Time	Date	Topic
1	1.51-2.50 p.m.	20.06.99	Manchester United Football Team
2	1.38-2.40 p.m.	24.07.99	i. Teasing Someone to Die ii. Courting Girls
3	6.29-7.30 p.m.	24.08.99	Teasing About Courting Girls
4	3.23-4.25 p.m.	29.9.99	i. Using Mother's Money ii. Christmas Wish
5	8.58-10.00 p.m.	08.10.99	i. Getting to Know Ones Age ii. Invitation to Mamak Stall
6	7.30-8.35 p.m.	10.11.99	i. Music ii. Boy's Favourite Game

The extracts were then edited to gain clear conversation sequence and to omit excessive chat that did not contribute to the analysis of this study. The extracts were edited as below:

- i. the font was changed to Times New Roman, font size 12"
- ii. the line spacing was changed to double spacing
- iii. the day, month, date, and time for both the openings and closings were changed to bold face

- iv. the given status of participants who did not contribute in the conversation was deleted
- v. the given status of participants who contributed in the conversation was changed to bold face. For example: (moonwalk (blink@j59.bkr31.jaring.my) has joined #mamak)

Besides editing the extracts as described above, each extract was also coded (Refer to the beginning of each extract in Appendix C) with:

- i. topic
- ii. list of participants' nicknames
- iii. total number of participants

3.3.2 The Questionnaire

The 100 questionnaires were divided into five faculties. 20 respondents were chosen from each faculty; hence, 20 sets of questionnaires were distributed to each faculty. However, only 93 questionnaires were returned. These undergraduates were chosen as respondents of the questionnaires because it is assumed that the IRC participants in this study must probably vary between the ages of 16 and 22 years. Based on this assumption, these undergraduates were chosen as respondents of the questionnaire.

3.4 Data Analysis

The six extracts were analysed to obtain results for:

- i. language conventions
- ii. code-switching and its communicative purpose
- iii. opening and closing phases of IRC

Major theoretical studies have examined conversation as interaction between participants, with conversation understood as spoken communication. One primary characteristic of conversation is that it is fully interactive; it has at least two participants, and they exchange messages in a real-time basis. Participants take turns in exchanging these messages, so conversation is fundamentally a sequential activity (Nofsinger 1991: p.3). The researcher extended 'speech' to include on-line chat, as it exists in chat rooms. On-line interactivity has similarities to speech in its notion of immediate feedback and therefore, differs from other computer-mediated communication form such as e-mails. There is a sense of virtual speech in on-line chat due to the language^s conventions used by the participants. There are also other significant differences, which this research aims to analyse.

3.4.1 Conversational Analysis

The primary method used to investigate conversation within chat rooms in

this study is Conversational Analysis (CA). In CA, the data consists of tape recordings of natural conversation, and their transcriptions. These are then systematically analysed to determine what properties govern the way a conversation proceeds. Similarly, this study recorded the *natural conversation* within chat rooms by saving the extracts in a diskette which were then analysed for language conventions, code-switching patterns and its communicative purposes and the openings and closings of the conversation.

Current Conversational Analysis (CA) builds on the earlier works of Harvey Sacks (1974), in collaboration with Emmanuel Schegloff (1974) and Gail Jefferson (1974) in their work in ethnomethodology. They focused on how interlocutors' experience, made sense of, and report their interactions. The researcher explored Sack's model of adjacency pairs to analyse the opening patterns in chat rooms where conversation is moved from face-to-face to an on-line environment. Moreover, this study also used Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson's (SSJ) (1974) model of location sequential as a framework to analyze the structure of the closings of the conversation. The adjacency pairs model (Page 30) and location sequential model (Page 30) were explained in Chapter II. Thus,* this study hopes to find out whether strategies employed in face-to-face conversation in the opening and closing phases are transferred to the IRC context. In addition to this, patterns of the IRC's opening and closing of conversation are described.

3.4.2 Analysis of Questionnaire

The researcher tries to prove that the usage of language conventions (emoticon and typographic features) during chat reflects on the type of users. Therefore, Questions 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10 are used to substantiate this finding. The researcher also intends to know the language used to chat in the Malaysian context. Thus, Questions 2 and 7 are used to ascertain the language used during chat to substantiate the findings on code-switching patterns in the Malaysian IRC. Therefore, the questionnaire was used to substantiate the findings on:

- i. language conventions
- ii. code-switching patterns

In conclusion, the researcher presents the analysis in three sections in the next chapter. The first section examines the language conventions (typographic and emoticon features) used in the extracts. The second section looks at code-switching patterns and the communicative purposes. The third section analyses the opening and closing phases of the chat.