CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The researcher had aimed to explore the overall communicative patterns and communicative strategies among the Safety Management Team on a construction site. The analysis of data in Chapter Four provides information about the language requirements of the Safety Management Team. This chapter sums up the research studies and states the implication of these findings. The research has indicated that the English language is a communication tool for the workforce of a construction site. For the workers to be the *bonafide* members of this community, English is vital though near native perfection in the English language is not required.

What is important in the cultural setting of the Safety Management Team is the members of the community must be able to get whatever message they have across in as effective a way as possible to achieve their common goals. The Safety Management Team uses a few communicative strategies to transmit the messages more effectively and clearly. These strategies are reflected repeatedly in all the communicative patterns among the Safety Management Team regardless of the hierarchy. In other words, all communication is moulded to the needs of the members of the discourse community.

This chapter summarises the findings of this study and the implications that can be drawn from them. The discussion begins with a summary of communicative patterns and strategies. The rest of the discussion that follows will be presented in relation to the research questions put forth in the study:

1. What are the communicative activities in which the Safety Management Team participates at the construction base?
2. What are the communication patterns and strategies observable in the methods of communication used in the above activities, especially with regard to the use of the English language?
3. What are the possible reasons for these communication patterns and strategies?
4. What are the implications of these communication patterns and strategies?

5.2 SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

The research indicates that communicative activities at the construction site are mainly functional interactions such as commands, reports, explanations, and instructions. These functional interactions have given rise to specific patterns of communication among the construction workforce. The obvious patterns of communication at the internal involve numerous meetings. These meetings are progress meetings, safety coordination meetings, toolbox meetings, safety briefings and safety induction programmes. Besides, there is an external level of communication, which mainly involves the government authorities. The communicative activities and communicative patterns at this external level were outlined clearly by the Safety Manager to the researcher because the researcher was not allowed to be present during meetings at this

level. The communicative activities at this level too are, basically functional interactions such as seeking permission, getting professional advice and requesting for provisions.

The choice of language used differs greatly between the internal and external level. Internal level communications are predominantly in English. However at the external level, communications are predominantly in the Malay language. Besides English and Malay, vernacular languages are also used when the different ethnic workers at the construction site speak with other workers from their own race. This happens regardless of hierarchy. The common vernacular languages are Chinese, Tamil, Indonesian and Bangladeshi.

The usage of English is predominant at the internal level especially among the top management people due to their educational background except for the two fresh engineers from the Malay ethnic group who were not well-versed in English. (Refer to communicative patterns of Safety Manager-Engineers in section 4.5.1 (a) This group of people are competent and fluent in English. They also use written English for specifications, variations, and documentations because the Project Contract is in English.

The middle level workers also often use English to interact with the top-level people. However code switching and mixing is a common occurrences some of the supervisory staff are not competent enough to clearly convey their messages in English. The bottom level workers too use English for interaction, especially the Bangladeshi workers. Whenever they interact with the top and medium level workers and their Indonesian counterparts, they use English though very often the response from the Indonesian workers is not in English. To overcome this problem the top and medium level staff act as interpreters to convey the messages clearly to the Indonesian workers.

The analysis of the data indicated that the proficiency level in English inclines towards 'communicative competency' rather than 'linguistic competency,' (Refer to section 2.11 in Chapter Two) especially for verbal communication. However language proficiency is given importance whenever it comes to the written form, that is when the top and the medium level workers have to write their technical reports for documentation.

The usage of English is prominent at all three levels. The top management staff, especially the Project Manager, Safety Manager, and two Senior Engineers are proficient in English. They use grammatically and structurally correct English when they interact among themselves. (Refer to Appendix A) However the fresh graduate engineers from the Malay ethnic groups very often code switch and code mix when they talk to their superiors though they, too, use English for interaction. Besides being incompetent in the English language, these engineers also lack confidence in speaking English. Thus, their communicative strategies help them to execute the given task properly in accordance with the safety code. (Examples in Chapter Four)

This same group of people 'diverge' to the proficiency level of their counterparts, the medium level workers (safety officers and supervisors) and the bottom level workers (craftsmen, trade labourers and security workers). The language used by them is not the same variety as that of the top level. They use simple English with code switching and code mixing, as well as the jargon of the construction site to make sure that their messages are sent across clearly to the workers. (Refer to appendix A) In this case, the grammar is generally overlooked and the linguistic features of the language appear to be unimportant. The language variety is closer to the basilect variety requiring the

'functional' messages that are to be received, and the related task executed accurately. Therefore, what is vital in this interaction is that the ' receivers' (workers) at the medium and bottom level understand the information conveyed by top-level people.

The medium level workers, the Safety officers and supervisors also interact in the English language though code switching and code mixing are rampant when they interact with their superiors and the bottom level workers. Code switching from English to Malay is obvious when they talk to their superiors. Their educational background and their incompetency in the English language are the possible reasons for this. Sometimes when the medium level workers try to 'converge' to accommodate their superiors, there are often grammatical and structural mistakes in their sentences. According to the Safety Manager, there are no hard and fast rules in the verbal language used. However, in writing the minutes of the meetings and technical reports these staff must use grammatically and structurally correct English. Therefore the safety officers and the supervisors often seek the help of the Safety Manager whenever they have problems in conveying their messages in written form and before the reports and minutes are sent for documentation.

The bottom level workers in this construction site are mainly Indonesians, Bangladeshis and Chinese who are trade workers. 90% of these workers are with little formal education and able to speak only very simple and broken English of the basilect variety. This variety of English is prevalent among the Bangladeshi workers because they do not know the Malay language. They have no other choice than to speak in the English language. However, their Indonesian counterparts are more competent in the Malay language, though some of them can speak the basilect variety of English. Those Indonesians who can speak the basilect variety of English often act as interpreters for

their own ethic group when they interact among the Bangladeshis. Sometimes the Safety Manager, safety officers, and the supervisors too act as translators.

The Indonesian workers can understand Malay because both languages (Indonesian and Malay) have common structures and vocabulary. This group of people have the choice of using either Malay or English when they interact with the top-level people. In circumstances where the message cannot be transmitted clearly through verbal communication, non-verbal communication such as gestures and signs are substituted for the verbal communication.

In brief, the internal communication is very much influenced by the addresser - addressee or the 'sender and receiver' relationship. Besides, the researcher has also observed that the ethnic and educational background of the participants also influence the language used, specially with regard to code switching and code mixing in the use of the vernacular languages. Among subjects of the same language background, the vernacular language is more commonly used. This can be seen especially when they communicate among colleagues of the same race, for example, when a Bangladeshi worker speaks to a Bangladeshi friend. The researcher did not record any vernacular dialogue among the workforce because it was beyond the scope of her research.

Code switching, code mixing and translation are frequent whenever the top-level people talk to the medium and bottom level workers in the organization. They use code switching, code mixing and translation as strategies to achieve their intended goals. These strategies are very rampant when the medium level workers interact with the bottom level workers. Here, too, code switching, code mixing and translation are used to facilitate their interaction and to match the understanding of the interlocutors.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The study does not aim to cover all aspects of the discourse community, the Safety Management Team. It only focused on the patterns of communication and the strategies of communication employed by the discourse community. The researcher hopes that the findings will ultimately assist new members of the discourse community of safety management personnel in the construction site.

The researcher found that an acceptable knowledge of the English language and the ability to use the language for functional purposes are more important for admittance into the world of the construction industry than a native like perfection. Linguistic proficiency is more linked to the ability to make the workforce; especially the medium and bottom level workers, understand the messages sent to them clearly. As the workers come from different educational backgrounds, their linguistic ability in English varies. Thus, the members at the top level have to adapt to the medium and the bottom level, and the medium level have to adapt to the top and bottom level respectively to achieve their cooperative goals.

Nevertheless, linguistic proficiency is emphasized and given priority at top level interactions because meetings are held in English and interaction among the top level officers, too, are often in English. Code switching and mixing occurs at times especially when engineers from the Malay ethnic group are present at the meetings. Normally, these engineers try to 'converge' in their communicative strategies to accommodate to the needs of their superiors. However, the lack of English language proficiency among these engineers is notable in their sentence structure and also when they code switch and mix

during the meetings. (Examples in Chapter Four). Besides, according to the Safety Manager, their lack of proficiency and competency in English influence their report writing. These engineers can hardly construct proper and grammatically correct sentences in English for their technical report writing. They often write in incomplete sentences, listing the main points to convey the messages. (Refer to appendix B) Normally the Safety Manager corrects the language in their reports before sending them for documentation.

In addition to this, these engineers too very seldom deal with other 'personnel' such as suppliers and consultants if the personnel interact in English. Normally these engineers will seek the help of the Safety Manager or the Project Manager who have a higher proficiency in English.

Another important aspect of English language use in the construction site is the technical terms of the industry. From the top level to the bottom level, workers in this discourse community use English technical terms. There is hardly any code switching or code mixing for the technical terms. Examples are 'road furniture', 'guard', 'concrete', 'scaffolding', 'manhole', 'scupper drain' and 'casting'. (More examples in Appendix A)

The findings of the research also showed that the Safety Manager often acts as the ESP teacher for his team. He conducts training for fresh engineers to write proper technical reports. He too hardly code switches while interacting with these engineers though very often he receives responses in Malay. According to him, one of the reasons for adopting this methodology is to encourage the fresh engineers to speak in English and build their confidence in interacting in English. Moreover, their confidence in oral English can help them in their technical report writing.

The English language requirements of the Safety Management Team, the context in which the language is spoken, the purpose of the communication and communication strategies employed by them, contain several pedagogical implications. The pedagogical implications in this study are related to communicative aspects required for this occupational group such as communicative needs and functions in terms of domain and setting, communicative events and interactions. Material, input, methodology and task based activities should be based on these considerations. The selections of lexical and functional items to be taught should be those which frequently occur in these specific areas.

5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Ethnographic style studies are helpful and should be conducted further to increase the information available on the authentic situation or the real working world. As ESP teachers might not have the time to actually go out and investigate each and every field for themselves, ethnographic studies would help them to better understand the chosen field.

This study is an ethnographic approach at a construction site, which involved the Safety Management Team. As we know, the construction industry has been and, is still, a very vital industry in the Malaysian economy and development. It involves not only Malaysian workers but also many expatriate professionals (Examples in Chapter 1) and foreign labourers. The English language, being the lingua franca, is widely used in this industry. Therefore it is recommended that future research could be done on other branches of the construction site, for example, the Project Management Team, to explore their need of the English language. Besides, studies related to the construction industry

such as interaction among 'Suppliers' and 'Contractors', communication patterns among 'Consultants' and 'Contractors' could also be investigated.

5.5 CONCLUSION

This research is not groundbreaking in its discovery. However, it is hoped that it could fill a small niche in the academic world of ESP. The researcher's main aim is to observe reality in context beyond the confined wall of the classroom. By going to the field, that is the construction base, the researcher has achieved her purpose. It is hoped that other ESP practitioners also will benefit from this study.