

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

Before proceeding with the review of literature, it must be said that works on conversations, discourse, Grice's Cooperative Principle and the conversational maxims as are studies on gender and language are limitless. This chapter is a necessary albeit limited review of the vast amount of literature and works available in the area pertaining to this study. In this chapter, the literature reviewed relates strictly to issues relevant and deemed vital to the topic of the research at hand. Included are discussions on conversations, the Cooperative Principle (CP) and maxims and women talk. Because this study is carried out in Malaysia and it is a study on the conversations of Malaysian women friends, it is felt that there is a need to include a brief overview of the linguistic scene in Malaysia. This chapter also encompasses literature on the recent developments in the arena of research on Grice's CP and all female talk.

2.2 Defining Pragmatics

In the study of linguistics, two main areas: semantics and pragmatics often overlap. This cannot be avoided as both semantic and pragmatics are concerned with 'meaning' in language. Indeed linguists and researchers are still debating over the dividing line between these two areas. This is clearly stated by Peccei (2002:1):

“Semantics concentrates in meaning that comes from purely linguistic knowledge, while pragmatics concentrates on those aspects of meaning that cannot be predicted by linguistic knowledge alone and takes into account knowledge about the physical and social world.”

The last two decades have seen an explosion in studies pertaining to language in conversations with findings revealing that more studies tended to veer towards research in the field of pragmatics. This can be seen in the works of Austin (1962) in the study of speech acts, Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) who investigated the notion of turn-

taking in conversations and H. P. Grice (1975) whose discussion in his work 'Logic and Conversation' led to the birth of a Cooperative Principle (CP) in conversations. These works are dealt with in pragmatics.

Many have attempted to define pragmatics. Leech (1983) in his definition states that:

“Pragmatics studies how people comprehend and produce utterance in verbal interactions in an authentic setting speech situation. It distinguishes two intents in each utterance or verbal communication. One is informative intent or sentence meaning and the other communicative intent or speaker meaning.”

Yet another definition of pragmatics is one by Yule (1996: 3) who sums it up in a sentence:

“Pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than is said.”

According to Jamaliah Md. Ali (2000), there are two major approaches in the field of pragmatics: the structural approach and the behavioral approach. This study deals with the behavioral approach whereby study “starts from the speaker-hearer, from the outside rather than from the inside of the language” and thus:

“takes indirect speech acts, correction strategies and devices, hedges, the dynamics of feedback and other speech act qualifiers, not as deviation from some underlying logic, but as manifestations of ‘common sense’ that individuals follow in their interactions.”

(Jamaliah Mohd. Ali, 2000: 37)

From the behavioral approach stems another domain in pragmatics known as Conversational Analysis (CA) which was founded by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974). Conversational Analysis is then the “study of the orders of talk-in-interaction, whatever its character or setting” (Have; 2007: 4). It can be said that this study makes use of the theories of both pragmatics and conversational in the analysis of the recorded conversations.

2.3 Conversations

Having defined the area(s) in which this study is set, it is important to look at what constitutes conversations. At a glance, conversations appear to be random, having no obvious system or direction. Speakers and hearers (interlocutors) seemingly speak when and how they like with no apparent order. It is only with the emergence of CA, that researchers were able to formulate evidence of an order, a certain structure in the direction of talk. This is substantiated by Heritage (1988) cited in Markee (2000: 40) that in a conversation, four observations can be noted:

- a) Conversation has structure.
- b) Conversation has its own autonomous text; that is, the meaning of a particular utterance is shaped by what immediately precedes it and also by what immediately follows it.
- c) There is no a priori justification for believing that any detail of conversation, however minute, is disorderly, accidental or irrelevant.
- d) The study of conversations requires naturally occurring data.

Looking at a), it can be said that the structure of conversation is often determined by the conversational setting. For example, classroom conversations follow a certain order; teacher asks a question, student answers, teacher gives feedback (T-S-T). The same can be said of conversations set in a doctor's office or even in a meeting. Casual conversations are freer, less structured and spontaneous and are an integral part of everyday life. One can hardly go through the motions of the day without talking to someone else. Therefore, conversations are:

“a joint activity consisting of participatory actions predominantly in the form of spoken utterance produced successively and extemporaneously by different participants in alternating turns at talk which are locally managed and sequentially organized.”

(Svennevig, 1999: 8)

Similar to Svennevig's definition, Cutting (2002: 28) believes that conversations are "discourse mutually constructed and negotiated in time between speakers" and she adds that conversation "is usually informal and unplanned." Drew and Heritage (1992) as cited in Holmes (2006: 27) states that conversations occur when:

"Participants jointly construct a particular social order and come to a shared interpretation of what is going on; context is inherently locally produced and transformable at any moment."

Talk then, as pointed out by Cook (1999: 51) can qualify as a conversation if and when:

- a) It is not primarily necessitated by a practical task.
- b) Any unequal power between participants is partially suspended.
- c) The number of participants is small.
- d) Turns are quite short.
- e) It is primarily for the participants and not for an outside audience.

Taking into account the various definitions, it can be said that conversations are then not always perpetuated by speakers trying to complete a task and while conversations are a joint activity, the dynamics of conversations differ from one group to another. According to Wardhaugh (1998: 246), "as we move from one group to another or from one language to another, we must learn new ways if we are to fit into that new group or into that new language." For example, a conversation with a colleague will no doubt vary from a conversation with a close friend. This can be observed from various aspects such as language choice, ambience, solidarity and shared knowledge.

In casual conversations or friendly talk, speakers can seek to maintain or establish relationships be it from a get together of school friends, a luncheon with workmates or a dinner with close pals. These conversations are carried out smoothly as if the interlocutors possess some kind of 'ability' whereby they can shift from one topic to another or to take their turns without obvious prompts or cues. This 'ability' is what

pragmatists' term as communicative competence. Saville-Troike (1996) as cited in Wardhaugh (1998: 245) wrote that:

“Communicative competence extends to both knowledge and expectation of who may or may not speak in certain settings, when to speak and when to remain silent, whom one may speak to, how one may talk to persons of different statuses and roles, what nonverbal behaviors are appropriate in various contexts, what routines for turn taking are in conversation, how to ask for and give information, how to request, how to offer or decline assistance or cooperation, how to give commands, how to enforce discipline, and the like – in short, everything involving the use of language and other communicative dimensions in particular social settings.”

2.4 Friendship and Women Talk

The above section dealt with conversations per se; nevertheless the intrinsic part of this study is one which deals with conversations of women friends. Thus, it is essential to have some idea of friendship and its influence on the talk of women friends.

Block and Greenberg (2002:1) highlighted that:

“It is rare to read of the electricity that suffuses female friendship, of the feelings women develop for one another that intensify their existence. Friendship remains a vast, fertile area of women's lives that is unexplored.”

This is set to change as recent years have seen some interest sparked in the study of women, their friendships and interactions (Lakoff, 1975; Aries and Johnson, 1983; Crawford, 1996; Coates, 1996; Block and Greenberg, 2002).

The result of these interest have shown that women view their friendship with one another as a significant if not a prominent role, one that is not to be taken as a back seat to their relationship with their spouse or work.

In fact, according to Ivy and Backlund (1994; 256):

“Many women feel that their friendships with other women are more intimate, rewarding and accepting than their relationships with men.”

This is perhaps better understood by taking Green's (1988: 121) perspective that "women-only company affords women the chance 'to let their hair down' and 'behave-badly', i.e. outside the limits of 'normal, acceptable womanly behavior'". The idea of women letting their hair down corresponds with Coates (1999: 68) who drew on Goffman's (1971) dramaturgical metaphor of women's backstage talk:

"One of the things women friends do with each other is talk over their performance front stage, describing the feelings that accompanied the performance. During such talk, women will often say things which contradict the polite front maintained during the performance."

For women, backstage talk is an outlet for them to present themselves as they truly are, a way to let their guard down, relax and shed the various characters (a wife, a mother, a daughter/ -in-law or a colleague) they 'play' front stage during the course of their everyday life. Backstage talk with their friends presents women the chance to say what they really want and how they really want, without the need to filter as they would with talk front stage. In fact for many women, life without a circle of close friends "would have been like going to see a good movie alone," (Block & Greenberg; 2002: 12). This simple analogy basically means that watching a good movie would be so much better because laughing, talking and sharing moments of it with a friend is certainly better and more meaningful than watching it alone.

Perhaps one of the most integral issues in female friendships is the '*talk*' between them. Coates (1996: 1) in her aptly titled book 'Women Talk' demonstrated this:

"women's talk is far from trivial, and that the label 'bitchy' betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of the way stories about absent others can provide a focus for discussing and re-evaluating social norms, and for the construction and maintenance of our personal identities, our 'selves'".

Indeed, women talk has often been labeled in less than creditable terms. ‘Gossiping’, ‘bitching’, ‘empty-chatter’ and ‘idle-talk’ are some common labels for women talk and these are the views Coates hopes to change. Holmes (1995:2) is of the opinion that since women enjoyed their talks and see it as a significant part in their lives, a means for keeping in touch, hence, the language in their talks is a mechanism “to establish, nurture, and develop personal relationships”.

Edelsky (1981) speaks of two kinds of floor that could happen in conversations: F1 and F2. The concept of floor is best understood as “the acknowledged what’s-going-on within a psychological time/space” (Edelsky; 1981: 406). If the observations of Coates and Holmes are right, then casual talk among women would be categorized as the second kind of floor – F2. F2 is termed by Edelsky (1981: 391) as “collaboratively developed floors...which show much simultaneity, joint building of an answer to a question, collaboration and developing ideas (appreciation of irony and scandal involved), and laughter.” F2 type of conversations indicates cooperation; that the interlocutors are “on the same wave length.”

What constitute F2 type of women talk? Aries and Johnson’s (1983: 1193) study on the conversational content among close same-sex friends revealed that “female exchange information more frequently and more in-depth about their doubts and fears, personal and family problems, and intimate relationships.” In short, women talk about everything, from relationships to work to personal affairs. It can be said then that women’s talk is the essential component, the main scaffolding of women’s friendship, a platform for sharing and support. In the conversations among women friends, the group voice takes precedence over the individual voice where “the construction of talk is a joint effort; all participants share in the construction of talk in the strong sense that they don’t function as individual speakers” (Coates; 1996: 115). Coates’ talk of a group voice is reinforced by Seiler’s (1996: 433):

“When people come together in a group; they form a collective identity that becomes the group personality.”

This idea of a collective identity is parallel to Locastro’s (2006: 108) view that participants in a conversation work “to co-construct the talk, each building on the previous speakers’ contribution.”

Another point by Coates (1996) cited in Hafizah Ahamad (2004: 3) regarding friendship and women talk is that:

“Women’s goal of consolidating friendship was reflected in the way they produced talk. Their cooperative talk is a joint talk where everybody is given equal chance to speak, contribute to the conversation, and develop a collaborative discourse.”

Where cross-cultural comparisons of women talk are concerned, it cannot be denied that the talk of women friends may differ from that of one culture to the next or even from one language to another. There is little evidence to suggest similar patterns in the friendship of women and their talk as this territory is still remains relatively unexplored. Nevertheless, there is suspect that “there may be a strong resemblance in the functions and outcomes of close female bonds from culture to culture” (Aires & Johnson; 1999: 223) and so says Coates (1996: 17) in her book:

“Anthropologists have explored the ways friendship varies from culture to culture, but at the same time have demonstrated the key role female friendship plays in women’s lives, whether on Crete, where the harshness of women’s circumscribed lives is made bearable by friendship with other women or in Central America, where solidarity and mutual support are vital in the maintenance of Aboriginal women’s traditional practices.”

2.5 Discourse features in women talk

Lakoff (1975: 73) once commented that:

“women cannot follow the rules of conversation: that a woman’s discourse is necessarily indirect, repetitious, meandering, unclear, exaggerated – the antithesis of every one of Grice’s principle.”

Chaotic is the word of choice by Coates (1996: 115) in her description of women talk and sums up Lakoff’s comments tidily. However, according to Coates there in the ‘chao-ness’ is a ‘melding’ and it is through this brand of melding that women’s talk becomes a joint and collaborative effort. While as ‘chaotic’ as women’s talk may be; researchers such as Tannen (1989) and Coates (1996) have found women’s conversations to bear certain aspects of regularity. These aspects are detectable in several features of discourse used by the women and perhaps when employed these features could play a role in the fulfillment of the conversational maxims. The discourse features are explained in the sections below.

2.5.1 Repetition

One of the discourse features found in women’s talk is repetition. Repetition from Coates (1996: 220) point of view is employed by women frequently as the result of “women friends adopting a collaborative floor” and can be seen as a “powerful way of affirming the group voice”. Repetition involves one or more interlocutor saying the same thing in one way or another.

According to Jamaliah Mohd Ali (2000:116), repetition is used as a strategy to “reinforce what others are saying” and that it is also “a way of showing support”. This mirrors Tannen’s (1989: 61) view that:

“Repetition not only ties parts of discourse to other parts, but it bonds participants to the discourse and to each other, linking individual speakers in a conversation and in relationships.”

2.5.2 Simultaneous and Overlapping Speech

Two other striking features in women's discourse are simultaneous and overlapping speech and is seen by Coates (1996) as part of the organization of friendly talk.

Talk is simultaneous when the interlocutors produce an utterance at the same time whereas speech overlaps when an interlocutor speaks before another has finished speaking, resulting in overlaps in utterances. Davies (2003) as cited in Coates (2007: 39) states that:

“Overlapping speech is the inevitable outcome of joint ownership of the conversational floor. But far from leading to conversational breakdown, overlapping speech in a collaborative floor entails a richer multi-layered texture to talk, where speakers demonstrate their shared perspective on whatever is being talked about and display ‘how finely tuned they are to each other.’”

2.5.3 Laughter

Another dominant feature in the talk of women friends is laughter. Coates (1996: 145) states that laughter is noticeably present in her recorded conversations of women friends and “occurs in response to a variety of different aspects of talk.” Laughter can be triggered by a joke, embarrassment, a show of support or hilarious moments in the conversation. Coates (2007: 44) theorize that laughter permits the interlocutors to; “signal continued involvement in what is being said and their continued presence in the collaborative floor – while not committing them to speak all the time.”

2.5.4 Minimal Responses

Yet another typical discourse feature that can be found in women friends' conversations are minimal responses. Minimal responses are responses that are brief and can be often seen in the forms of one or two word responses. Some examples are ‘ah’, ‘yeah’, ‘uh-huh’ (Coates, 1996).

Schegloff (1972) as cited in Kollok, Blumstein and Schwartz (1986: 36) describes how participants in talk used minimal responses, it:

“...was usually done with great skill, making use of the slight gaps or pauses for breath that occurred, so as not to affect the flow of the other person’s speech or interrupt the other in any way. Such timing demonstrates that the woman is paying very close attention to her partner’s speech.”

These perfectly timed responses act as signals of acceptance and agreement to what is said. A minimal response can even indicate ‘Yes, I hear you. Please continue’ or ‘I am here, this is my floor too, and I am participating in the shared construction of talk’ (Coates; 1996: 143).

Reid (1995) asserts that utterances have to abide by certain criteria for them to be deemed minimal responses. These are the criteria by Reid which are felt to be connected to this study:

- 1) They must be made in response to another speaker. This ensures they really are a ‘response’.
- 2) They contain little semantic content since they serve only to indicate participation or, at most, agreement.
- 3) They do not generally interrupt the flow of speech from the first speaker.
- 4) The second speaker, that is, the one who produces the minimal response, is not attempting to take over the floor.

(Reid; 1995: 494)

While minimal responses may generally indicate support, close attention, agreement and such offers a different view of the use of minimal response in conversations. She explains that the lack of progressivity in topic or conversation “may be displayed by using one’s turn to produce minimal response” and that it could be a signal for “closing off a topic” Svennevig (1999: 189).

2.5.5 Hedging

Hedging, a term introduced by Lakoff (1972), “to refer to those words that make statements vague” (Hale; 2004: 105) is another feature of discourse found in the talk of women friends. Examples of common hedge phrases used are ‘I think’, ‘Maybe’ or ‘More or less’. Hale (2004: 105) further states that “by adding a hedge to a statement, the speaker is not committing himself/herself to the truthfulness of the proposition.” The reason for the use of hedges can be explained by taking Yule’s (2006: 130) explanation:

“We use certain types of expressions, called hedges, to show that we are concerned about following the maxims while being co-operative participants in conversations. Hedges can be defined as words or phrases used to indicate that we’re not really sure that what we’re saying is sufficiently correct or complete.”

In connection to hedges, Coates (1996: 162) believes that there is growing evidence that women have a tendency to use hedges more than men and this is due to the components in women talk that:

“...we often discuss sensitive topics; we practice mutual self-disclosure; and finally we establish, and therefore need to maintain, a collaborative floor.”

2.6 Grice: The Cooperative Principle and Conversational Maxims

In the section 2.4 above, women’s conversations have been described as collaborative albeit being chaotic. This notice of collaboration is reflective of Henry Paul Grice (1975: 45), an English language philosopher’s theory that:

“Our talk exchanges do not normally consist of a succession of disconnected remarks, and would not be rational if they did. They are characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in them, to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction.”

Hence, Grice believes that conversations are not random in nature and it involves a certain degree of cooperation and some convergence of purpose. Grandy (1989: 516) who wrote about Grice's theory on language explains that "convergence does not mean identity, and purposes may change during the conversation. Otherwise, at least one of the parties would have no reason to continue the conversation and we are presuming that the participants are rational agents."

In Davies' (2007: 2311) article 'Grice's Cooperative Principle: Meaning and Rationality, he cites two views that are similar to that of Grice's observation:

"One of the defining features of conversation is that it is cooperative in nature."

Fais (1994: 231-242)

"...speakers cooperate...When studying transcripts of genuine conversation one is struck by the general atmosphere of cooperativeness and harmony."

Stenstrom (1994:1)

Fais (1994) and Stenstrom (1994) describes conversations as 'cooperative' and it is this notice of the presence of a cooperative atmosphere in conversations that led to the birth of the famous Cooperative Principle (CP) and Grice (1975: 45) explains how the CP works:

"We might then formulate a rough general principle which participants will be expected (*ceteris paribus*) to observe, namely: Make your conversational contribution such as required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. One might label this the Cooperative Principle."

Grice sees the CP as a basic principle governing conversations whereby the interlocutors follow certain norms, patterns and regularities when interacting with one another "regardless of cultural background" (Peccei; 2002: 27). Simply put, the CP posits that interlocutors enter into an unspoken agreement to cooperate when conversing. This too is emphasized by Thomas (1995: 62) who states that, "in

conversational interaction people work on the assumption that a certain set of rules is in operation, unless they receive indications to the contrary.”

In addition to the CP, Grice proposed four conversational maxims that interlocutors should ideally abide by to maintain successful conversations. In his epilogue to ‘Studies in the Ways of Words’ Grice (1989: 370) refers to maxims as “moral commandments” and how these maxims would fall apart without the support of the CP:

“Somewhat like moral commandments, these maxims are prevented from just being a disconnected heap of conversational obligations by their dependence on a single supreme Conversational Principle, that of cooperativeness.”

The conversational maxims are:

Quantity

1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange).
2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

Quality

Try to make your contribution one that is true;

1. Do not say what you believe to be false.
2. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

Relevance

1. Be relevant.

Manner

1. Avoid obscurity of expression.
2. Avoid ambiguity.
3. Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
4. Be orderly.

Therefore Grice (1989: 370) in describing the maxims asserts that; “their observance promotes and their violation dispromotes conversational rationality.”

However, in the years following its introduction, Grice's neatly 'packaged' CP and maxims have come under many criticisms. According to Green (1996: 100):

"In talking about the observance of the Cooperative Principle as rational, Grice (1975, pp 47, 49) hinted that he took it and the maxims to represent values universally assumed in human society."

Mey's (2001: 270) concern is that when it comes to real conversations; "What if people decide not to be cooperative?" He goes on to say that "some cultures are inherently geared toward verbal confrontation (such as the Jewish East Coast Americans described in Tannen 1984)". This problem has also captured Green's (1996: 100) attention and cites Keenan (1976) whose opinion is that "the maxims do not universally govern human talk exchanges". Keenan (1976) as cited by Green (1996: 100) supports his opinion with an observation that:

"Malagasy speakers regularly withhold information from their conversational partners', and concluded from this that they must lack the first maxim of Quantity, and that therefore, the maxims are not universal".

Hence, based on the observations by Mey (2001) and Green (1996); it would be very difficult to ascertain the claim on universality unless one can prove that they are either well-versed in every culture in the world or they are part of that culture.

2.7 The fulfillment and non-fulfillment of maxims

The CP and conversational maxims can be looked at from two different angles. The first is fulfillment and the other, non-fulfillment (via violation, flouts etc). This can be seen in Attardo's (1993: 539) article 'Violation of Conversational Maxims and Cooperation: The Case of Jokes', whereby he spoke of several ways in which a speaker could view the CP:

“A speaker could: **fulfill** the maxims, **violate** them, **flout** or (exploit) them, opt out of them or be faced with a clash between two maxims.”

2.7.1 Fulfillment

Taking Attardo’s view, one way of viewing the CP is to fulfill it. The terminology ‘fulfill’, sometimes known as adherence or observance is derived from Grice’s Logic and Conversation essay (1975: 49). This basically means that the speakers are abiding by the CP by observing the four maxims. This is perhaps the most common of all cases in conversations and the act of maxim fulfillment advertises cooperation clearly.

The example below taken from Thomas (1995: 64) demonstrates a classic case of all maxims being fulfilled;

Example 1

Husband : Where are the keys?
Wife : They’re on the table in the hall.

All the maxims would be fulfilled if the keys were found to be placed exactly where the wife said it would be found. The reply to her husband’s query is sufficient thereby fulfilling the maxim of quantity (not too little, not too much), truthful (quality), straightforward and clear (relevance and manner). Having heard the answer, the husband knows just where to locate the car keys. No implicatures were generated (that is to mean no extra or additional meaning is hinted at here). Hence, the husband has only to understand what is literally said.

2.7.2 Non-fulfillment

While it has been determined that interlocutors do adhere to Grice’s prescription of a CP, this being accomplished by following a certain “order of conversation” (Have;

2007) Grice is nevertheless aware that there are many instances in conversations where the interlocutors ‘fail’ to fulfill the maxims.

Example 2

A : Is he nice?
B : She seems to like him.

The above example taken again from Thomas (1995: 66), illustrates a situation where non-fulfillment (non-adherence/ non-observance) has occurred. It is clear that the answer to A’s questions merely required a simple ‘Yes’ (He is nice) or ‘No’ (He isn’t nice). Instead, B avoids the direct route (hence not fulfilling the maxim of manner, which is to be direct) and gives a less informative answer (disregarding the quantity maxim). This according to Mey (2001: 73), is a situation where B has “failed to observe the principle demand set up by Grice in the CP: namely to cooperate with your conversational partner.”

Attardo (1993) has stated several ways one can ‘fail’ to fulfill a maxim. In this study, non-fulfillment is looked at from the standpoint of ‘violation’ and ‘flouting’. The contrast of these two forms of non-fulfillment can be understood from Grice’s (1975: 49) justification:

Violation : He may quietly and unostentatiously violate a maxim; if so in some cases he is liable to mislead.
Flouting : He may flout a maxim; that is he may blatantly fail to fulfill it.

In both cases, the maxim(s) are deliberately not observed. In violating or flouting, more than one maxim can ‘fail’ to be fulfilled (see *Example 2*). The distinction between a ‘violation’ and a ‘flout’ lies in the fact that the former is done “quietly” or inconspicuously (it is only known to the speaker himself/herself that he/she is failing to fulfill the maxim(s) whilst with flouting, there is an obvious show of maxims being violated (e.g. joke, sarcasm). Peccei (2002: 27) asserts that:

“Violations are ‘quiet’ in the sense that they are not obvious at the time of the utterance that the speaker has deliberately lied, supplied insufficient information or has been ambiguous, irrelevant or hard to understand.”

In cases where flouting occurs, usually the speaker intends for the hearer to look for a meaning different from the utterance or expressed meaning:

“A flout occurs when a speaker blatantly fails to observe a maxim at the level of what is said, with the deliberate intention of generating an implicature.”
(Thomas; 1995: 65)

While for Mey (2001: 73) some cases of non-fulfillment of maxims are seen as failure to cooperate, Brumack (2006: 1210) is in the opinion that:

“Whenever, for some reason the speaker fails to observe one of more of these maxims, the listener may still choose to rely on the cooperative principle and infer the implied meaning from clues available in the situational and conversational context.”

While this study takes flouting and violation into account, they will be discussed under the general term of maxim non-fulfillment.

2.8 Implicatures

When non-fulfillment occurs, one or more maxims have not been adhered to. Grice finds fascination in cases where the conversational maxims are not fulfilled, yet hearers are still able to make sense of the actual message that was intended to be transmitted to them. This notion was observed by Grady (1989: 517):

“What interested Grice, however were the cases in which a maxim appears to be violated but where, upon further reflection, the audience can figure out, on the assumption that the speaker is being generally cooperative, how the speaker is being subtly cooperative.”

In other words, there are instances in conversations whereby what is ‘said’ (the literal meaning) may not be what is ‘meant’ (what is implied) or what is ‘said’ may not seem connected to what is asked thereby resulting in the circumstance of non-fulfillment.

These additional meanings are conveyed by implicature and these “implicatures are generated from various non-fulfillments of the CP” (Mooney; 2004: 901). While maxim violations could lead to non-fulfillment, Peccei (2002: 27) from Grice’s analysis believes that they do not generate implicatures. Flouting however does create implicatures, and this further strengthens Thomas’ (1995: 65) view in the previous section.

The term implicature stems from the word ‘imply’ which means to ‘hint’ or say indirectly. Thus, an implicature is the unstated meaning in an utterance and it is left to the hearer to infer, so as to arrive at a meaning which seems logical to him or her. In Grice’s words as cited in Hawley (2002: 971):

“what is [conversationally] implicated is what is required that one assume a speaker to think in order to preserve the assumption that he is observing the Cooperative Principle (and perhaps some conversational maxims as well).”

Kempson (1977: 71) speaks of several characteristics unique to conversational implicatures:

- i) They are dependent on the recognition of the co-operative principle and its maxims.
- ii) The working out of an implicature will depend upon the assumption about the world which the speaker and hearer share. They will therefore not in general be predictable independently of the shared assumptions particular to the individual speakers and hearers.
- iii) They are cancelable.

Below is an example of an implicature by Grice (1975: 51);

Example 3

- A : I’m out of petrol.
B : There’s a garage round the corner.

Here, one can see that certain maxims have not been fulfilled: quantity (insufficient information) and manner (vague/ not direct). B is conversationally implying through his response that A could fill up the tank at the garage nearby. A therefore would have to work out the meaning of B's utterance by assuming that there is a connection to what he (A) has said, for otherwise, it would serve no relevance.

Pertaining to the iii) of Kempson's (1977) characteristic of implicatures, Mey (2001: 49) demonstrates:

Example 4

Alex ate **some of** the raisins,

I add as an afterthought:

In fact he ate **all** of them.

The addition of the afterthought thereby 'cancels' the initial utterance's implicature 'some' and it turns out in truth (as presented in the afterthought) that 'all' the raisins were in fact eaten. This example justifies the observation that:

"Conversational implicatures can always be 'untied', canceled, in the course of further conversation: being 'implicated' by a particular conversational context, another conversational context can 'ex-plicate' them again."

(Mey, 2001:49)

For implicatures to prove effective, Grice (1969) as cited by Kulasingam (2004: 32) suggests that participants should:

- a) Cooperate as intended.
- b) Consider relevant aspect of social setting.
- c) Shared background knowledge.
- d) Recognize the conventional meaning of the chose topic.

2.9 Indirectness and implicatures

The connection between indirectness and implicatures lies in the fact that when speakers give indirect utterances, implicatures are generated, and results in maxims, one if not all are unfulfilled. A clearer picture of the relationship between indirectness and implicature can be seen in the following example:

Example 5

A : Let's go to the movies tonight.
B : I have to study for an exam.

Searle (1975: 61)

B's answer to A's suggestion is indirect, thus producing an implicature. This prompts A to look for a possible relationship of what has been uttered by B to A's utterance. B is therefore using the excuse that he/she has to study to indirectly decline A's invitation to the movies. In doing so, it can be said that the non-fulfillment of the maxims of manner (be orderly) and relevance have occurred.

Finegan (2004: 303) believes that the relationship between indirectness, implicature and the non-fulfillment of maxims are interlinked. This is clearly seen in Finegan's characteristics list of indirect speech acts:

1. Indirect speech acts violate at least one maxim of the cooperative principle.
2. The literal meaning of the locution of an indirect speech act differs from its intended meaning.
3. Hearers and readers identify indirect speech acts by noticing that an utterance has the characteristics of 1.
4. As soon as hearers and readers have identified an indirect speech act, they identify its intended meaning with the help of knowledge of the context and of the world around them.

In other words, as summed up by Brumark (2006: 1207):

“Viewed from a Gricean perspective, indirect speech may be explained as more or less deliberate non-observance of the maxims requesting one to be as informative, brief, relevant and adequate as appropriate to a given situation.”

For one to rationalize an implicature produced by an indirect utterance, Davies (2000:

18) adapted from Davies (1997:52) states that:

“Hearers assume that an utterance addressed to them is intended to be meaningful, therefore if the utterance doesn’t have an appropriate conventional meaning, they will look for a more useful (and nonconventional) interpretation. As far as the Hearer is concerned, the Speaker providing an uninterpretable (meaningless) utterance would be pointless and therefore irrational.”

Finegan (2004) further expressed that some prerequisite is needed if the speaker wishes the hearer to decipher the intended meaning of the indirect speech. Finegan (2004: 304) firmly believes that interlocutors should “share sufficient background about the context of the interaction, about each other and their society and about the world in general.” It would seem that shared knowledge is not only necessary for interlocutors to decode indirect speech and implicatures but also serves as a contributing factor to produce cooperation in talk. Coates (1996: 122) also declared that the talk of women friends is cooperative because these women friends draw on their shared knowledge of local events and this aids in producing talk which is collaborative.

Finegan’s observation of shared knowledge seem to corroborate with Kempson’s (1977) view on conversational implicatures; that implicatures emerge from indirectness in speech which causes at least a maxim violation and that to comprehend implicatures and indirectness, speaker and hearer must share some knowledge be it past, present, situational, contextual or general.

Thomas (1995: 145) rationalizes several reasons why interlocutors employ indirectness in talk. Among the reasons she deems important are:

- i. The desire to make one’s language more/less interesting
- ii. To increase the force of one’s language
- iii. Competing goals
- iv. Politeness/ regard for ‘face’

Of the four reasons, the most popular is the notion of politeness made famous by Brown and Levinson (1978). The theory of politeness proclaims that in interacting with everyday society, one should as much as possible refrain from committing face threatening acts (FTAs). According to Lakoff (1975) and Brown and Levinson (1987), women are more indirect as they are more concerned with being polite than compared to men who are less indirect and less concerned about face saving. However, Rundquist's (1992: 431) findings revealed that there is little empirical evidence to prove this assumption.

Lakoff's (1975) third rule in her Rules of Rapport is to 'be friendly' (camaraderie). Tannen (2005: 18) states that "Camaraderie conventionalizes equality as an interactive norm and honors the principle R3, "Be friendly". Therefore, an important point to note is that Lakoff's third rule of rapport places emphasis on the "equality between speaker and hearer, and it enhances closeness between them". Thus, "indirectness can be also employed when the speaker and hearer understand each other completely" (Tsuda, 1993: 66).

Asmah Haji Omar (1995: 50) asserts that Malaysians tend to be indirect when conversing as it is very much part of their culture. Indirectness or '*beating-about-the-bush*' as she terms it is used because it:

"Not only does it side-step the bluntness and lack of finesse (*kasar*) that are often corollaries of directness, but as an extension of the routine type of phatic communication it also serves as a "warming up" device. The device provides the temporal space for the speaker to assess the status and the mood of one spoken to, as well as to take stock of the situation that forms the background to the speech event".

2.10 Pragmatic Effects

Having established the line between fulfillment and non-fulfillment with that of indirectness and implicatures, it is time to discuss the various ‘pragmatic effects’ that emerge when non-fulfillment occurs. The term ‘pragmatic effects’ surfaced in Brumark’s (2006) study of non-observance of Gricean maxims in family dinner table conversations. These effects according to Brumark (2006: 1222) can be seen in the guise of humor and laughter (via teasing and joking) and sarcasm or irony;

“The pragmatic effects of more indirect and less transparent non-observation could appear as joking (generally supposed to be humorous), irony (whether humorous or not) or even sarcasm, depending on context, addressee, and purpose.”

2.10.1 Humor

Often in conversations sudden bouts of laughter can be heard usually resulting from something said or by a non-verbal action that is found to be humorous by the interlocutors. Jenkins (1985) cited in Brumark (2006: 1211) stated that “indirect or implicit utterances functioning as spontaneous ironic and humorous contributions may arise in most kinds of communication.”

Humor is then defined by Long and Grasser (1988: 37) as “anything done or said purposefully or inadvertently, that is found to be comical or amusing”. Humor can stem from friendly banter, joking or teasing and according to Kowalski (2000: 233); “women’s teasing tends to be more playful and relationship-enhancing.” Still in connection to humor, Crawford (1996: 148) finds that it is:

“much more context-bound [than men’s]. It is more created out of the ongoing talk to satisfy needs of [a] particular group of women. Since the goal of the interaction is intimacy, there is not the same need to compete for performance points...[women’s] humor includes and supports group members by demonstrating what they have in common.”

Another take on women's humor is by Kaufman (1991) cited in Hay (2000: 714), that [Feminists'] preferences are toward spontaneous wit, amusing real-life anecdotes and other forms of humor that are participatory."

Often, humor and laughter goes hand in hand and Coates (1996:149) is convinced that laughter is a significant component in the talk of women friends:

"Laughter occurs frequently not just because people say funny or shocking things, but because we take huge pleasure in the talk we create and in our skill at 'melding in together.'"

Jariah Md. Jan (1999) finds that laughter is used to signify various functions. It can serve as an indication that the speaker is relaxed and acts as a tension reliever. The presence of laughter, giggling, joking in women talk is also noted in Jerrome's (1984) study of a female friendship group dubbed the "Tremendous Ten" (Bubel; 2006: 28).

2.10.2 Sarcasm and Irony

Mey (2001: 43) said that "Well-known phenomena such as irony, sarcasm, metaphor, hyperbole and so on shows us the richness and diversity of the life behind the linguistic scene." An example of sarcasm is demonstrated by Mey (2001: 44) whereby in reply to an airline agent who told him that he could not get a seat due to overbooking, he (Mey) said, "Great!" The utterance is certainly not an expression of joy of not getting a seat (sentence meaning) but in actual fact saying (implicature generated) that "This is the worst thing that could happen to me now."

Pragmatic effects such as irony, hyperbole and sarcasm produce implicatures and are hence viewed by Grice as blatant violations of the maxim of quality (do not say what you believe to be false). These effects, in Wilson's (2006: 1723) opinion are:

"designed to trigger a related true implicature: in the case of metaphor, this would be a simile or comparison based on the literal meaning, in the case of irony it would be the contradictory or contrary of the literal meaning, and in the case of understatement it would something stronger than the literal meaning."

Wilson (2006: 1722) provides examples of how implicatures arise from using ‘pragmatic effects’:

Example 6

1. Mary (*after a difficult meeting*). That went well.
2. As I reached the bank at closing time, the bank clerk helpfully shut the door in my face.

Sentence (1) meant that the meeting didn’t go too well and in (2) the word ‘helpfully’ is an irony for at closing time the clerk would be eager to go home and would not welcome last minute customers. In both cases, the utterances are contrary to the literal meaning.

2.10.3 Echoic Use

Another pragmatic effect that could occur in conversations is one labeled by Sperber and Wilson (1986) as echoic use. Suffice to say, echoic utterances are very much like repetitions (see 2.4.1), but in the context of this study, echoic utterances it serves as a reference to pragmatic effects in the case of maxim non-fulfillment. The following example taken from Wilson (2006: 1730) demonstrates echoic utterances:

Example 7

Jack : I had dinner with Chomsky last night.

Possible echoic responses:

- a. Sue : You had dinner with Chomsky! What did he say?
- b. Sue : You had dinner with Chomsky! Is he in England?
- c. Sue : You had dinner with Chomsky! Don’t make me laugh.

Echoic use in conversations is a tool used to allow the hearer (Sue) to have a moment to think of a suitable response to the speaker’s utterance: a) surprise and excitement, b) skepticism and c) disbelief.

Wilson and Sperber (2004: 626) believe that echoic utterances may result in attitudes (of the speaker) which are rich and varied:

“The speaker may indicate that she endorses or dissociates herself from the thought or utterance she is echoing; that she is puzzled, angry, amused, intrigued, skeptical and so on, or any combination of these.”

While Relevance Theory indicates that because an utterance is echoic, it is ironical thereby resulting in the non-fulfillment of the maxim of quality (do not say what you believe to be false). From a different perspective however, taking Wilson and Sperber’s own view (in the above citation) the use of echoic utterances could be a display of the hearer’s puzzlement and intrigue and as such one could assume that these would cause a violation in the maxims of quantity (insufficient information resulting in puzzlement) and relevance (the hearer is echoing in order to find a relevant association with the speaker’s utterance).

2.11 Past studies relating to Grice and women talk

Certainly, the birth of Grice’s CP and conversational maxims has triggered interest in the pragmatics realm. Numerous studies have been done on the CP, maxim violations and indirectness. Among noted studies which employed the Gricean framework are Attardo (1993) who focused on the violations of maxims in jokes, Mooney (2000) who seeks to revisit Grice’s CP in a re-thinking of the taxonomy of non-fulfillment, Davies (2007) who looked at meaning and rationality behind the CP and Lumdsen (2008) who investigated kinds of cooperation.

Studies done on the CP and maxims which were most relevant to this study are Rundquist (1992), Brumark (2006) and in the Malaysian pragmatic and linguistic scene Kulasingam (2004). However, these studies were centered on mixed discourse whereas this research is focused on all female discourse. Rundquist’s study concentrated on

indirectness in gender flouting whilst Brumark targeted non-observance of Gricean maxims in family dinner table talk and Kulasingam analyzed informal talk of Malaysian secondary school teachers. Rundquist and Brumark's studies concluded with evidence of indirectness and the presence of pragmatic effects when non-fulfillment occurred. In her study, Kulasingam (2004: 92) found evidence of adherence to the maxims in informal talk:

“The Cooperative Principle was maintained because the listeners were able to infer the underlying meaning from the context and the shared background knowledge”.

Although there were occurrences of maxim violations Kulasingam (2004: 93) states that these non-fulfillments did not halt communication in any way. She states that:

“Superfluity, exaggeration and humor were striking features of the conversations. These features often led to the violation of the maxim of quantity. Although this maxim was frequently violated, these violations did not lead to miscommunication or a misunderstanding”.

With regard to the all female discourse aspect of the study, the works of Coates in her book 'Women Talk' (1996) and Hafizah Ahamad's (2004) study on formal features of cooperative talk among Malay female speakers were looked at. Both works found evidence of cooperativeness in the talk of women friends. Hafizah Ahamad (2004: 117) summed up by saying:

“The findings in this study confirm Coates' (1998) findings that women's conversations do produce the sense of co-operativeness among the conversationalists and there is no hierarchical structure in a group of friends engaged in informal conversations.”

Findings also indicated that the discourse features that were employed by the women functioned to promote and to establish closeness and rapport. One of these features as found by Hafizah Ahamad (2004: 112) was laughter. She claimed that laughter featured significantly in the conversations of the Malay female speakers. This is again supported by Coates (1996: 146) who observed that:

“...laughter plays a special role in the construction of a collaborative floor. It allows participation to signal their continued involvement in what is being said, their continued presence in the collaborative floor.”

Other discourse features revealed in Hafizah Ahamad and Coates’ study were minimal responses, hedges, simultaneous speech and overlaps. In both their discussion, it was made clear that the combination of the discourse features promoted cooperative talk and talk became a joint, collaborated activity.

2.12 The Linguistic Scene in Malaysia

As the study is done on Malaysian women, some explanation must be given on the linguistic scene in Malaysia. Malaysia is country diverse in its race, religion and culture and as such the linguistic scene is a blend of many languages and dialects. This is inevitably due to the influences of the many races and cultures surrounding everyday life. Malays speak Malay which is often fused with ‘*kampung*’ (village) dialects whereas Chinese speak Mandarin, Cantonese, Hokkien or Teochew among others and Indians speak their mother tongue such as Tamil, Malayalam or Punjabi. Other ethnic groups such as Kadazans of Sabah and Ibans in Sarawak have their unique blend of language as well.

The official language of Malaysia is Malay. English is, according to Asmah Haji Omar (1997) cited in Jariah (2003: 42):

“...second in importance in the hierarchy of the Malaysian language, seen in terms of official recognition given to the language, its importance as a language of educational instruction as well as its position as an important language in the professions.”

English is taught in schools alongside Malay (Bahasa Malaysia). Most Malaysians are bilingual or trilingual, having learnt Malay and English in schools and their mother tongue at home.

2.12.1 Malaysian English

Having established that Malaysians are varied in race, religion and culture, it is not surprising that the English Malaysians speak has its special brand of flavor. This unique way Malaysians speak English can be attributed to the ‘fusion’ of the many languages and dialects (i.e. Malay, Chinese, Tamil etc) so much so that it has been given a name of its own; ‘Malaysian English’ or commonly referred to as ‘Manglish’. Manglish is the “colloquial version of the English language spoken in Malaysia and it is a portmanteau of the word Malay and English (also possibly Mandarin and English)” (Wikipedia; 2008).

This uniqueness has been observed by Tongue (1974:11) cited in Jamaliah Md.

Ali (2000: 24):

“Anyone who has been only a short time in these countries (i.e. Singapore and Malaysia) will have had the remarkable experience of listening to a speaker who has been conversing in near native discourse switch to very formal ESM i.e. the English of Singapore and Malaysia when he speaks to some familiar only with the sub-standard form referred to as the local dialect in this paper, or chats on the telephone with an intimate friend. This is a dramatic incident – everything seems to change including grammar, vocabulary, voice quality, pace of utterance and even gestures. The sub-standard forms, it is interesting to note, are also picked by foreigners who have been in the region for some time and used as “intimacy signals” when conversing with their local friends.”

One of the most distinctive features of Manglish is the famous ‘lah’ particle. It can be used to realize different pragmatic functions such as “emphasizing support”, “persuading”, “avoiding conflict” and “complimenting” (Jamaliah Md. Ali; 2000: 29).

Some examples of Manglish taken from Pillai (2006: 71) can be seen below:

Example 7

- i. Got Lost tonight~~lah~~.
(Translation: There is ‘Lost’ on television tonight.)
- ii. Hot ~~ah~~ this one?
(Translation: Is this spicy?)

Other distinctive features of Manglish are the use of question tags ‘or not?’ and questions with the particle ‘kan’ at the end of an utterance. Some of the functions of these questions are used to illustrate “support”, “to persuade” or “to compromise” (Jamaliah Mohd. Ali; 2000: 30).

2.12.2 Code-Switching

As many Malaysians can speak more than one language, this means that the speakers are able to use two or more languages concurrently when conversing. Being bilingual or trilingual allows the speakers to have the ability to code-switch in conversations.

Kuang (1999: 77) defines code-switching as “the ability to speak two languages at same time, a natural process in the refining of one’s mastery of a certain language, a normal strategy employed to perform various functions.”

Steensig (2003: 806) who cites Backus (2000) wrote that there exist two types of code-switching:

“One type has a clear base in one language into which short extracts from the other language are inserted, whereas the other more integrated type is like a true ‘bilingual code’ with frequent and bi-directional switches.”

In Malaysia, both types of code-switching as stipulated by Backus are evident. Baljit Kaur (1994) regards code-switching in the Malaysian context as a means for the establishment of rapport among the interlocutors when conversing to a person of different ethnic backgrounds. In her article M. Khemlani (1992: 32), says that there are many reasons for code-switching. Among them are as:

- a. A strategy to establish rapport and a sense of identity with whom one is speaking to.
- b. A distancing strategy – A means for excluding participants from parts of conversations which is meant only for a certain party.

- c. An indication to the speech partner that one is of a certain social class. For example English is used in between the native languages marking elite and educated status.
- d. To maintain message of content (e.g. proverbs, metaphors etc.) These expressions are better retained in their language may not have the same impact or flavor is translated.
- e. To strengthen or soften a command.

[Adapted from M. Khemlani (23rd Oct 1992) The New Straits Times]

Since code-switching is a wide phenomenon in Malaysia, studies have been done on the functions of code-switching in the Malaysian conversational scene such as Kow (2003) who looked at code-switching in pre-school Malaysian children and Zuraidah (2003) who focused on the dialect code-switching of the Kelantanese. Kuang (1999) in her research found that code-switching serves as a strategy which interlocutors utilize to indicate a change in topic or as a tool to diffuse a tense situation. Code-switching can also display authority or power, emphasize or re-emphasize or simple to express emotions.

2.13 Conclusion

In this chapter, the main terminology and relevant literature concerned with the topic of this study have been discussed. Although research on conversation is not new, nevertheless investigation of casual and spontaneous conversations are still a rarity, more so when it involves all female discourse in Malaysia. However, with works by Lakoff (1975), Aries and Johnson (1999), Coates (1996; 2007) and Tannen (1989; 2005) the literature on women and their conversations are growing, thus paving way and allowing newcomers to seek new pastures where research on women's discourse (and in this case women friends discourse from a Gricean perspective) are concerned.