

## **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter comprises of a discussion on the research methods employed in this study. Discussion will include the theoretical framework emulated, selection of participants, topic, age, data collection methods, segmentation of data for the purpose of analysis as well as a section on the identification of fulfillment and non-fulfillment of Grice's conversational maxims.

### **3.2 Theoretical Framework**

In chapter one, it has been established that this research is a case study and its main focus will be to investigate the conversations of Malaysian women friends within Grice's framework of the CP and conversational maxims. The maxims (quantity, quality, relevance and manner) as Grice believes are an integral part of what efficient conversations are made of. Brumark (2006: 1210) asserts that these maxims are "supposed to govern both the production and interpretation of the messages" in conversations. Hence, this study will make use of Grice's theory of the Cooperative Principle and its conversational maxims in the analysis of the recorded conversations.

### **3.3 The Participants**

The reason for undertaking this research is to examine women friends' discourse in connection to Grice's maxims in terms of fulfillment and non-fulfillment. Therefore, the selection of participants for this study underwent several phases to determine that suitable participants were chosen.

### **3.3.1 Gender**

In the case of this study, gender selection is important. The title of this research itself states that it is to be a study centering on female discourse between women friends in Malaysia. For the study to be legitimate, it is crucial that all the participants are to be Malaysian women friends.

### **3.3.2 Age**

Another factor to be taken into account in this study is age. This is considered as it has been observed that women's behavior evolve as they become older. For instance, one can go from being shy in girlhood to outgoing, even rowdy in their middle years to being 'mistress of interruption' in their older years (Hill; 1987: 127). This view is supported by Philips (1987: 7) who said, "*older* women and men speak differently than do *younger* women and men". In the attempt to minimize the effect of age in conversations, the participants selected consist of women between the ages of 20 and 35. This is to ensure that the language used in the conversations would have patterns of similarity. For example, the women of this chosen age group may feel less inhibited and the language used may be 'outgoing' and 'rowdy' (uses of lingo or swear words) and may contain more 'bahasa rojak' (mix language/ code-switching) compared to women of an older age who may use 'proper' English (due to their English education in their school years) and may be more demure. Another factor which contributed to the choice of selecting women of this age group is that this researcher being within the frame of this age group, therefore would perhaps be on the same 'wave-length' as the participants and hence this would lend a helping hand in better understanding and rationalizing the findings during the course of analysis.

### **3.3.3 Number of interlocutors**

For this study on multi-party talk, each set of conversations contain a minimum of three and a maximum of five interlocutors. Preisler (1986) as cited in Hay (1995: 36) states that for the purpose of analysis, small groups are more fruitful than larger ones as interlocutors can relax and ‘the more relaxed the speakers are the more natural the data will be’. Another point to note is that smaller groups are easier to manage and there would be ‘less conversation within a conversation’ and less havoc. The using of smaller groups would help the researcher to keep track of each interlocutor’s utterances when the transcription process and analysis stage begins.

### **3.3.4 Relationship between the participants**

Yet another factor that has been considered is the intimacy, in other words, the relationship between the speakers in the conversations. Since it is a study delving onto the topic of women friends, therefore each conversation recorded are conversations between good friends. In most cases, these women have known each other for quite some time and are able to pick up from where they left off (in terms of friendship) easily. In fact, most of the groups of friends do meet up occasionally just to catch up or to get away from the stress in work and life in general.

Although the level of intimacy in each group will no doubt vary across the conversations, the fact remains that the conversations which have been recorded can be described as discourse between Malaysian women who are good friends.

*Table 3.1: Summary of conversations recorded*

<b>Conversation Code</b>	<b>No. of participants/ interlocutors</b>	<b>Participant codes in substitute of names</b>	<b>Length of transcription [approximately]</b>
1F	3	S, F, L	55 minutes
2CH	3	P, C, Y	50minutes
3ST	5	S, J, N, F, Y	60 minutes
4SL	5	D, Y, S, T, K	41 minutes
5HL	4	K, A, V, T	46 minutes
6JA	3	J, S, D	60 minutes
7AL	3	AL, WY, C	58 minutes

Table 3.1 above is a summary of the conversations recorded. Each conversation is coded to ensure there would be no confusion during the process of transcription and analysis. Coding is also convenient as it enables the researcher to differentiate each conversation in the analysis procedure.

1F is a conversation consisting of three participants - college friends who are now working in the city and are very close friends, meeting up regularly for shopping or dinner. 2CH is a conversation of a trio of school friends in their secondary days and have been inseparable since then. They are very comfortable with each other and meet up almost every week. 3ST are women in their twenties still pursuing their studies and have been friends (one or two have been roommates) for a few years. 4SL are women friends who met when taking a course at a college. Despite, the rather short acquaintance these 5 women bonded and their camaraderie is evident in the recording. Participants in the conversation coded 5HL are colleagues at work and have been for at least three years. They have in their everyday meeting at work developed a friendship of sorts. In 6JA, two of the women are college friends since the early 1990's and the other is a cousin to J. In this conversation J who has been in America for the past year was back and met up to catch up with her friend and cousin. The last conversation 7AL, are

three university friends who are in the midst of pursuing their masters and PHD respectively and often have ‘pot-luck’ at each other’s home. All three have been friends since their degree days in Malaysia. Coincidentally, all three women managed to secure a place at the same university to pursue their higher degrees in Kyoto, Japan.

In all the conversations, the groups of women are speaking in English (Malaysian English to be more precise). It is to be noted that the participants are fluent in English and most of the time they do speak English whether at home or at work. Hence, English could be considered their first language (as spoken most of the time).

### **3.3.5 Setting**

In order to reap maximum benefits out of the conversations, it was felt that there was a need to allow the participants themselves to set the ambiance in which the recordings would be done. In short, the recordings would take place where and when it was most suitable and relaxing for the participants. Owing to this, conversations 1F, 2CH and 6JA were held in restaurants during dinner whilst conversations 3ST, 5HL, 7AL were recorded in one of the participant’s home. The recording of 7AL was done in Japan in AL’s house and the recording was passed on to the researcher when they were back in Malaysia in 2008. Conversation 4SL was recorded in between breaks in a café at the college.

### **3.3.6 Topics**

Because this study is an investigation into the fulfillment and non-fulfillment of Gricean maxims in *casual* conversations between friends, it was not necessary to set a topic for the participants to ‘talk’ about, unlike conversation analysis done on forums, interviews or court proceedings.

Nevertheless, in order to have some semblance of similarity for analysis purposes, it was decided that the participants' conversations should revolve around two general topics – that of work and relationships. These topics generate flexibility in talk and allow the women freedom to 'move' within the conversations as these are broad topics. In addition, these topics were selected as these were two of the typical topics in female conversations as perceived in Bischooping's (1993) research 'Gender Differences in Conversation Topics'. Similar findings were discussed in Coates' *Women Talk* in chapter 4 '*We talk about everything and anything*'. These topics represent real-life issues in which the women talk about and face every day. Another advantage of the suggestion of topics is that it helped break the ice at the start of the recording. It also inevitably aided in setting the momentum and pace of conversation as well as giving the participants a direction in which their talk would be based upon.

### **3.4 Data Collection Methods**

#### **3.4.1 Purposeful Sampling**

In this investigation, the participants were determined by using purposeful sampling. The participants are determined following the set of criteria (age, gender, nationality etc) as discussed in section 3.3.

Data was then gained first through immediate circle of friends, which then lead to a recommendation of other groups of existing women friends. Whilst some were reluctant, others were willing. According to Hay (1995: 39) in her master's thesis, this method (using friends and recommendation of friends) has a number of advantages. Among the positive aspects of this method is that:

1. Most of the participants are acquainted with the researcher or have been recommended by friends of the researcher. Therefore, participants were more comfortable and willing to help someone familiar or someone they know of.
2. Consent was easily granted after a detailed explanation of the study and what the participants needed to do was given.
3. Being acquainted with the participants allowed the researcher to gain insider knowledge and observe how the friendships operated.
4. By being familiar with the participants, the researcher is able to go back and forth to triangulate data (recording, observing, reconfirmation, notes, taking opinions) especially to 'gap-fill' or confirm with the participants circumstances that seem vague or ambiguous in the conversations during the transcription process.

Towards the end of the transcribing process, the interlocutors were happy to provide some of their opinions and insights about their conversations and their perceptions will be included in the final chapter of this study.

### **3.4.2 The Recordings**

The analysis and findings are based on a corpus of seven recorded conversations, each which involved conversational interaction of approximately 40 minutes to 60 minutes in length. The recording device of choice was an Mp3 player. This was chosen mainly as it was small and thus inconspicuous enough to ensure that the participants or interlocutors would not be aware of it after the initial start of the conversation. This is similarly noted by Tannen (1984: 34) who observed that "if there is a relatively large number of participants who have ongoing social relationships, they soon forget the tape-recorder".

Although the number of participants in this study is between 3-5 interlocutors, on the account of the existing bond of friendship and social relationships and ease with one another, the Mp3 was soon forgotten and taping went on smoothly.

The conversations were audio taped and taking Sack's (1984: 26) view on his interest in working with audio-taped conversations:

“Such materials had a single virtue, that I could replay them. I could transcribe them somewhat and study them extendedly – however long it might take. The tape-recorded materials constituted a ‘good enough’ record of what had happened. Other things, to be sure happened, but at least what was on the tape had happened”

(Hutchby & Woofitt; 2008: 70)

Although a video-recording device may capture more especially non-verbal actions, nevertheless, the participants expressed that they would feel more uncomfortable and more guarded in their talk. These are certainly two situations that a researcher would like to avoid as they would contribute to talk being mechanical and unnatural.

### **3.4.3 Observation and Field Notes**

In four out of the seven conversations, I was able to play the role of an observer when the recordings took place. This permitted me to take notes of situational happenings and capture non-verbal interactions that could contribute to a better understanding during the analysis. For the remaining three conversations, I was unable to observe (in these cases, the Mp3 player belonged to one of the participants involved). This was due to problems with timing and location. However, taking advantage of the factor of being acquainted with at least one if not all of the interlocutors in these three conversations, I was able to turn to them in situations where difficulty arose in the transcribing process.



In instances of ambiguity and inaudible utterances during the transcribing process, the participants were happy to 'gap-fill' either by listening to the recording again or by my description and keywords taken from the conversations concerned.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

The participants who expressed willingness to participate in the recordings were all briefed on the details and purpose of the study. Conversations were only recorded when consent was given. Time was of the essence and to have recorded conversations first and asked for consent after might have resulted in data collection that would have taken a longer period to achieve as some might have felt enraged that their conversations were recorded without permission. The participants were assured that their identity would remain anonymous (in the transcriptions, the actual names are substituted by alphabets) and that the data would be used solely for the purpose of the research.

### **3.6 Data**

The data comprises of seven sets of spontaneous conversations of groups of women friends. The conversations are in its entirety in English with the occasional mix of code-switching whereby the participants would slip in and out of their mother tongue such as in Malay or Hokkien. The recordings contain features that are expected of natural conversations – bouts of laughter, teasing, personal disclosures and problems. These are conversations of women who have developed a close bond with each other and the display of solidarity and close rapport are evident.

### 3.7 Data Analysis Methods

#### 3.7.1 Transcription conventions in data transcription

The notation symbols used in all of the transcripts are adapted from Jefferson's (1984) transcription conventions (see appendix 1). Although there may be many different kinds of symbols or notations devised by different conversation analysts, Jefferson's were adapted for its simplicity and non-complexity of the symbols. The symbols are easily memorized and there was no need to keep referring to the table in the midst of the transcription.

#### 3.7.2 Turns

Having determined the notation symbols, the transcription process begins and utterances in the conversations are systematically divided into turns. A turn is defined by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson as "everything one speaker says before another speaker begins to speak" (Tsui; 1995: 7). The example below illustrates a turn:

---

*Turn 1*→        1    S    :    Let's talk about sex. (#)

*Turn 2*→        2    L    :    Ye:ah, right.

*Turn 3*→        3    F    :    Eh nice, creative ah

---

[Taken from researcher's data: Conversation 1F]

#### 3.7.3 Selection of examples for analysis

For analytical purposes, examples were selected on the basis of occurrences of fulfillment and non-fulfillment of conversational maxims. In the selection and coding of examples, several factors were taken into account. There was a need to bear in mind the

context of conversation in determining fulfillment and non-fulfillment occurrences. Other factors to be noted are situational happenings as well as shared knowledge between the participants.

Vocalizations not interpreted as words such as laughter, the ‘hmms’ or ‘ah’ as well as tone and pitch of voice were also taken into consideration. The reason for this is that; “the general idea behind this practice is that these vocalizations can have interactional meaning, for instance a claim to a turn of speaking” (Have: 2007: 99) or in the case of this research it could function as a technique for fulfilling or not fulfilling a maxim.

The analysis of the data collected will primarily be qualitative. The intent of this study is to look at two central phenomena in the conversations among Malaysian women friends. Simple and basic quantitative data will be provided to show similarities and differences in trends found in the data, thereby further reinforcing evidence of the qualitative discussion. The use of statistics will also highlight the frequency of certain techniques employed and perhaps indicate preference towards a particular technique(s) in the fulfillment and non-fulfillment of maxims from a Malaysian context.

### **3.8 Identification of fulfillment and non-fulfillment**

Findings will be divided into two main categories:

- I. Fulfillment : This means adherence to the conversational maxims of quantity, quality, relevance and manner. (i.e. minimal responses, hedging etc)

- II. Non-fulfillment : This is defined as failure to observe the conversational maxims (i.e. corresponding to ‘flouting’ and ‘violation’ of maxims). This definition is replicated from Brumark’s (2006) study of non-observance of Gricean maxims in family dinner table talk.

Relevant findings will be presented as sub-categories under the two main headings and discussed individually.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced the research and data collection methods used in the investigation of conversations of Malaysian women friends with specific reference to Grice’s cooperative principle and the maxims that interlocutors abide (or not) in their discourse with one another.

The methodology section is an intrinsic part of research as it helps the researcher to determine the best designs (the framework in which the study is set, data selection, participants, working with data etc) in which to approach the study and to yield concrete and fruitful results.

The following chapter will see these methods put to use in the findings and analysis of women talk pertaining to Grice’s maxims.