CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Case study approach

A qualitative case study approach was applied to examine the realisation of teacher and student directives in Malaysian ESL classrooms in the present study. The case study approach was selected due to several reasons. Firstly, a small number of audio-recorded lessons was utilised for data analysis. Therefore, the case study approach was selected to allow the examination and collection of a large amount of data so that greater insights and deeper understanding of the issue under investigation could be obtained. Secondly, the case study approach allows the use of various techniques to collect data. These techniques include observations, interviews, audio-visual materials and documents (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Finally, the case study approach, according to Salkind (2009), may lead to the discovery of new directions for further study.

3.2 Review of data collection methods

Although there are several data collection methods that could be employed in the case study approach, those that are typical of classroom discourse research include classroom observation (Hayes & Matusov, 2005; Heath, 1978; Ho, 2005; Mohammad Umar Farooq, 1998; Takakubo, 2001; Tan, 2007; Yang, 2008), audio-visual materials (Dalton-Puffer, 2005; He, 2000; Heath, 1987; Ho, 2005; Mohammad Umar Farooq, 1998; Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975; Takakubo, 2001; Tan, 2007; Walsh, 2002; Yang, 2008) and interviews (Tan, 2007). Therefore, the strengths and weaknesses of the methods of classroom observation, audio-visual materials and interviews will be reviewed.

Classroom observation can be accomplished by means of direct observation and participant observation. In being a direct observer, the researcher observes the

environment under investigation either from the inside or outside but does not participate in the happenings within the environment. On the other hand, the researcher actively participates in the proceedings within the environment being studied as a participant observer. Classroom observation allows personal and multi-sensory experience of the environment being examined. However, classroom observation is invasive and may affect the participants and the events within the environment (Creswell, 2009; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Hence, the direct observation method was selected to minimise the amount of intrusion imposed upon the lessons observed.

Audio-visual materials that are normally used in classroom interaction research are video recordings and audio recordings. Audio-video materials are advantageous in that they could be a relatively discreet data collection method and they directly and authentically capture the reality of the environment being studied (Creswell, 2009). Nonetheless, audio-visual materials may be negatively affected by background noises and unnatural behaviours of the participants due to the presence of audio-visual recording devices (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). To overcome the weaknesses of this method, only audio recordings were obtained by means of a fairly small-sized good-quality audio recording device.

Interviews generally take the form of face-to-face interviews, in which participants are interviewed separately and in person and focus groups, in which participants are interviewed as a group. Semi-structured interviews involve several key questions although new ones may be brought up whereas unstructured interviews involve questions that may be changed and adapted depending on the interviewees' response (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Interviews enable acquisition of biographical and historical information and control over the type of questions asked; nevertheless, interviews produce information that is subject to the perception and opinions of the interviewees and possibly biased responses owing to the researcher's presence

(Creswell, 2009). Therefore, this method was employed not individually but jointly with the methods of classroom observation and audio-visual materials.

3.3 Data collection

The data utilised for analysis in this study are the audio recordings of three lessons of three different teachers in a private English language learning centre in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and audio recordings of two interviews, one with a teacher and the other with a class of students. The audio recordings of the lessons were made from February to March 2008 whereas the audio recordings of the interviews were made in August 2008.

3.3.1 The setting

Malaysia is a multiracial and multicultural South East Asian country comprising predominantly of three ethnic groups. These ethnic groups are Malay, Chinese and Indian. The major languages spoken in the country are Bahasa Malaysia, which is the national language; English; Chinese dialects and Indian dialects. Several languages are used as the primary medium of instruction in primary and secondary schools; namely, Bahasa Malaysia in national schools, Mandarin Chinese in Chinese vernacular schools, Tamil in Indian vernacular schools and English in private schools. At university level, Bahasa Malaysia and English form the medium of instruction in public universities while English is the medium of instruction in private universities and colleges.

The language centre in which this study takes place is a branch of a large group of private English language learning centres. Located in the area of Kepong in Kuala Lumpur, this branch has been in operation for more than five years. The courses it offers are based on the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations syllabus. All of its students and teachers were Malaysian non-native speakers of English with the exception

of one teacher who was a Mauritian non-native speaker of English. This English language learning centre was selected for this study as it is an established organisation. Furthermore, the researcher had access to the organisation as well as relevant support and permission as a part-time teacher at the learning centre at the time of research.

Three classes were selected for data collection on the basis of the teachers' teaching experience, the teachers' willingness to participate as well as the classes' similarity of skill level.

The first of these classes (coded as Lesson 1) was held on Sundays from 1.30pm to 3.30pm. The class comprised of eleven students, eight of whom were female and three of whom were male. Ten of the students were Chinese while one of them was Malay. Their ages ranged from 14 to 19. Most of the students were studying in Chinese vernacular schools while some of them were studying in national schools and one of them was studying in a college. The teacher of the class had been teaching the students for approximately 2.5 years at the time of research.

The second class (coded as Lesson 2) was held on Tuesdays from 8.00pm to 10.00pm. The class consisted of five students, four of whom were female and one of whom was male. The students, whose ages were between 16 and 22, were all Chinese except for one who was Malay. Three of the students were studying in national schools while the rest were working. At the time of research, the teacher had been teaching the class for 1.5 years.

The third class (coded as Lesson 3) was held on Sundays from 3.45pm to 4.45pm. There were ten students in the class, including seven females and three males. All of them were Chinese. Their ages ranged from 12 to 22 years. All of them were studying; most of them in Chinese vernacular schools, some in national schools and some in colleges. The teacher had been teaching the class for three years at the time of research.

3.3.2 The data

The data for this study consists of 318-minute audio recordings of three lessons and 27-minute audio recordings of two interviews with selected participants. The proceeding of a single lesson of each selected class was audio-recorded on a portable digital media player between the months of February and March of 2008. The dates on which the recordings were made were selected with regard to the convenience of the teachers selected for the study. The audio recordings were subsequently transcribed. Interruptions and the duration of pauses were not included in the transcription as the interest of this study is not the features and structure of the discourse but the utterances involved in the realisation of directives. One of the lessons was also observed but the others were not observed because permission could not be obtained from the relevant teachers. Based on the results of analysis of the transcripts, two semi-structured interviews, one with a teacher (coded as Interview 1) and another with a class of students involved in this study (coded as Interview 2) were conducted in August 2008 to investigate the factors that influence the participants' use of directives and politeness strategies. The interviews were audio-recorded and the audio recordings were transcribed.

3.4 Data analysis

The purpose of data analysis was to identify the types of directives utilised and politeness strategies utilised to realise these directives in the classrooms. The data collected was analysed by applying two theories; they are Bach and Harnish's (1979) speech act schema and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. Based on Searle's (1979) definition of a directive, all directives used by teachers to students and students to teachers were identified and coded. Subsequently, the types of directives used by the teachers and the students were identified and coded utilising Bach and

Harnish's (1979) classification of directives. However, it must be noted that directives that were produced as a result of the researcher's presence were not included in the analysis because only one of the lessons was directly observed and somewhat affected by the presence of the researcher while the others were not.

After that, the type of politeness strategy and substrategies used in performing each directive were determined and coded according to Brown and Levinson's (1987) classification of politeness strategies. The fifth politeness strategy of not performing the face threatening act was disregarded in this part of the data analysis as it is unobservable. The next part of data analysis involved the performing of an informal statistical analysis of the coded data.

Based on the findings of the statistical analysis, interview questions regarding factors influencing choice of politeness strategies were formed. Two semi-structured interviews, one with a teacher and another with a class of students who participated in this study, were conducted to discover their motivations for selecting certain politeness strategies for certain types of directives. The results of the interviews were subsequently examined.