CHAPTER 3

MATERIALS AND METHOD

3.0   INTRODUCTION

The main focus of this study is to examine the question forms used by Dominant Speakers of English (DSE) of South Indian descent (see Chapter 1). To identify the question forms regularly used and the topics the target group (TG) often talk about or the domains of their discussion, a preliminary study was carried out.

The next step was to identify the TG. Then a suitable tool was devised that would be able to identify the question forms used by the TG and the extent to which they were standard forms. In this chapter, the results of the preliminary study, the method used to identify the respondents, the instruments used in the study and the method of analysis are discussed.

3.1   PRELIMINARY STUDY

Prior to this study, several informal conversations among DSE aged between16–18 were recorded. These consisted of DSE of all ethnic groups as the aim was only to reveal the purpose and situations of their conversations and the types of questions asked. A study of their conversations revealed that many of the questions asked were in the form of statements. This would mean that the members of the group were able to understand that a question was asked even though the utterance was syntactically a statement. The rising intonation and the use of particles help the DSE identify these structures as questions. Some examples of questions obtained from the initial four hours of recording will be discussed here.

EXAMPLE 1

This is an excerpt of a conversation among friends regarding the SPM examination slip

A;   *So what about you guys? You have it or what?*

        (So, what about all of you? Do you have it?)

B: *Yah. We took it already.*

        (Yes. We have taken it already.)

There is ellipsis of the auxiliary *do* and the phrase *or what* is added probably to enable the interlocutor to identify this structure as an interrogative. 'A' has no idea if his friends had received their examination slip. He is not asking the question with the assumption that his friends have the examination slip.

EXAMPLE 2

A casual conversation between two classmates

C: *Eh, Kelly. You pretty or not?*

        (Kelly, are you pretty?)

D: *Of courselah I'm pretty.*

        (Of course I am pretty.)

In the question above, C has not made an assumption of how D will respond. He does not know and has no assumptions of whether D thinks of herself as pretty or otherwise.

There is ellipsis of the auxiliary *are* while the particle *or not* is added at the end position of the question to identify the structure as an interrogative and not a declarative. This could be the influence of Malay whereby the question is asked with *or not*

        Cantik ke tak?

        (Pretty or not?)

EXAMPLE 3

Two students are discussing their trial exam results.

E: *I know you got C4, right?*

        (I know that you got C4, didn't you?)

F: *No lah. I'm being humble here.*

        (No. I am being humble.)

In the conversation above, E has assumed that F has obtained the grade C4 for his trial exam for a certain subject and the purpose of the utterance is to confirm this. Syntactically the utterance by E is not a question but F actually responds in such a manner that he understands that E is seeking confirmation. The phrase *'You got a C4'* is clearly a declarative but with the particle or tag *right* at the end of the utterance, the interlocutor is able to identify the pragmatics of the question whereby E is actually seeking confirmation.

EXAMPLE 4

A group of friends talking about what they did the day before.

G: *It's about a riddle, right.*

        (It's about a riddle, isn't it?)

Again the word *right* substitutes the tag *isn't it*. This is quite the opposite of the belief that ME has a generalised tag of *isn't it*.

It was found in the preliminary study that a lot of particles were used by the DSE when questions were asked. Thus, there is a possibility that these particles play a role by acting as substitutes to the syntax of a question. Furthermore, it was found that the use of particles increases as the DSE downshift and as such they probably scaffold onto particles when they go down the lectal cline.

EXAMPLE 5

Two students are discussing their math problems.

     H: *Then you just put sine, ah?*

           (Then, do you have to find the sine value?)

     J: *No need.*

           (That is not necessary)

H has used the particle *ah* and the auxiliary is dropped. H is asking a question because he does not know the next step to solve the problem. However J understands H's question and responds that it is not necessary.

EXAMPLE 6

Another example would be in a *wh* questions. A group of students are in class doing self-study

     K: *What you have now, eh?*

           (What do you have now?)

     L: *Recess lah*

           (It's recess)

Here there is ellipsis of the auxiliary *do* and the particle *eh* is used. It seems that the use of *eh* substitutes for the auxiliary *do* and as such it may play a role whereby it acts as an identifier of an interrogative form in the *wh* questions. At the same time, L is well aware that this is a question and knows exactly what is being requested showing that communication is successful.

The preliminary study suggested that in informal conversations, there was a particular pattern of how the questions were structured and it also showed that the use of particles were common. The syntax and word order used to elicit response was non-

standard but appeared consistent and was understood by the hearer. Thus, it was felt that an audio recording of the casual conversations of the target group (TG) would not elicit sufficient or suitable data as there will be no guarantee that the target forms will be used. A more suitable tool was required to obtain question forms of the mesolectal variety from the TG. For this purpose, the structured questionnaire was found to be most suitable. As the aim of this research is to study the structures of the question forms in ME used by the DSE, the method used must be able to reach out to many TG members and each respondent should be tested several times as to prove that this is his variety at the particular situation. Furthermore, the fact that the same situations can be repeated with other TG members assists in quantification of the results.

3.2 TARGET GROUP (TG)

This study aims to find out the question forms used by dominant speakers of English (DSE). The DSE was chosen because it is assumed that they will have the more acrolectal and mesolectal varieties of ME. Thus, the first criterion to be a member of the target group is that he or she must be a dominant speaker of English (DSE) (see Chapter 1). In this study, DSEs are described as those who have English as their L1 and those who have acquired English before going to school (before 5 years of age). English must be the dominant language they use with friends and the use of other languages should solely be due to necessity such as in the classroom or with a friend who is unable to communicate in English. English must also be the main language in the family discourse as the home environment plays an important role in determining whether a person can be considered a DSE. Thus, the TG members must speak predominantly English at home as well. They may speak their MT but the use will be limited. This was determined with the use of the personal questionnaire (refer to section 2 of Appendix 1). Information, such as the language used in conversations

49

with parents and other family members, in some common daily activities and language used during extreme emotions, would help to determine if the respondent qualifies as a DSE.

Some of the DSE may have acquired English along with their MT but increasingly began to use English in most of their communication. In other words, for the purposes of this study, English must be the dominant language used in most speaking /communicative contexts (refer to section 1 of Appendix 1), such as to think, analyse and even dream in this language (refer to section 3 of Appendix 1). They may be able to express their feelings using other languages but is most comfortable using English for these purposes.

The second criterion is that the TG must live in urban areas because it is assumed that those from the rural areas will have less exposure to English, and therefore an increased use of the MT and Malay. In urban areas such as Kuala Lumpur, it is expected that more English is used due to the increased socio-economic status of urban dwellers. However, the variety of ME used in urban areas of Malaysia will comprise many sub-varieties, depending on factors like educational background (for example, Chinese or Tamil medium schools), language shift within families or communities (that is from hereditary languages to English), economic background, ethnic factors, geographical differences and age. Thus, in an attempt to control the variety of English used and to increase the validity of this study, the research is confined to those residing in the areas surrounding Klang with similar ethnic background, family background, socioeconomic background, same age group and same school (refer to section 1 of Appendix 1).

In relation to these factors, the third criterion was to select respondents from the same ethnic group. This was to ensure that they had similar linguistic influences based on their parents' L1 and if they used them together with English at home. Thus, all TG members were from the South Indian ethnic groups where both parents of the TG members were South Indians. Those of North Indian descent (Punjabi, Gujerati etc.) were excluded as

the North Indian languages are linguistically different compared to the South Indian languages, whereas there is a relationship between Dravidian languages like Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam (see Kachru, 1996).

To ensure that the respondents shared the same educational background, the fourth criterion was to select students who study in National Schools at the primary level. If the respondents attended National Type Schools, that is the Tamil medium schools, there is a possibility that Tamil may be their dominant language and they would not qualify as a DSE. To control for the type of influence they may have had, potential respondents who attended international schools were excluded because they may be taught by non-Malaysian teachers and also have had peers from other countries which may influence their variety of English. As such their responses may not be reflective of local usage (see section 1 of Appendix 1).

The fifth criterion relates to the TG's proficiency in English with reference to the Local Examination Syndicate. The criterion is for the TG to be considered proficient in English, that is, they must have obtained an 'A' in the Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah (primary school examination), Penilaian Menengah Rendah (Lower Secondary Examination) and the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (O'Levels equivalent) for English subject (refer to section 2 of Appendix 1). As such, it can be assumed that this group is at the higher end of the English proficiency levels.

Finally, the selected TG members were within the ages of 15-18. It is during this period of time that they are impressionable and influenced by the styles of their generation thus, a possibility of them forming a variety of their own. They are influenced by the media, namely the language used in movies and television programmes as well as lyrics of contemporary songs and tend to bring these styles into their everyday language use vis a vis their use of slang and style and even certain features. Apart from that, their exposure to English would be from their home and school that is the variety used at home and the English used by their

English teachers who are non-native speakers as well and their peers. The influences are rather contained to the school and home given the restricted environments they function within at this age compared to people who work or study abroad.

Gender of the TG members is not an issue or criteria to be tested in this study. What is being identified is the variety of English by this group of individuals consisting of both boys and girls (refer to section 1 of Appendix 1). In order to identify the TG, questionnaires were administered to ensure that they fulfilled the criteria mentioned (Appendix 1).

3.3   THE PERSONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire was administered in order to identify the respondents' background to determine if they can be considered as DSE (refer to Appendix 1).

3.3.1   THE STRUCTURE OF THE PERSONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

The personal questionnaire was divided into 3 sections (Appendix 1):

- Section1   -   personal biodata
- Section 2   -   family background
- Section 3   -   language proficiency

In section 1, the respondents' age, ethnicity and schools attended were identified. This is to make sure that each respondent is a teenage South Indian attending a national school and living in a sub-urban area (refer to 3.2). Section 2 identifies the respondents' family background and how much exposure they have to their MT. As previously mentioned, in order to be considered a respondent, the person must be a DSE. However, if a DSE has a lot of exposure to the MT at home it may not be suitable to include this respondent as a member of the TG. Thus, for the purpose of this research, if the respondent

speaks to both or either one of his parents solely in his MT, he would be omitted from this study.

The last section is the section on language proficiency where the respondents' grades and use of languages were determined. The grades indicate that the respondent is proficient at English. If respondents indicated that they used a lot of MT, they would not be considered as DSE and as such will not be selected to be members of the TG. Furthermore, the use of the language to express anger and sadness would indicate a person's dominant language, as one who is incapable or finds it very hard to express anger or extreme sadness in English would most probably not be a DSE.

The researcher initially identified a total of 31 respondents as suitable TG members based on her prior knowledge about them. The questionnaires were administered to them but only 28 respondents were found to have fulfilled the stipulated criteria (refer to Figure 3.2) and as such, three of the respondents were removed from the study.

3.4   THE STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

The purpose of the structured questionnaire was to analyse the variety of English used in the informal speaking situation. It is assumed that the TG members will use their informal variety when talking to other TG members.

McDonough (1997) and Nunan (1992) list interviews as a suitable tool to study linguistic variations (see 2.7). As structured questionnaires are closest to structured interviews in format and assumptions (McDonough, 1997), coupled with the fact that this study deals with empirical data as well, it was found that the structured questionnaire would be most suitable for this study. However, respondents did not see the questions in the questionnaire nor did they need to tick, circle or write the answers as in the study conducted by Lee (2006) (see 2.7). Their verbal responses were written down by the

researcher. Thus, similar to interviews, the respondents were free to give their responses and were not governed by the suggested responses provided giving the respondents some linguistic freedom. The role of the researcher when conducting the questionnaire was to explain the situation clearly to the respondent and to wait for the response. The researcher explained the situation to the respondents individually. When the response was given, the researcher ticked the appropriate box and if the response was not that which was listed, it was noted down. This will reduce the time taken by the researcher to write out all the responses. Adaptations can also be made to the responses and this method would be less time consuming.

Thus in the questionnaire, the expected response for each question in each situation was prepared in the following order:-

(A)   The most probable response (the mesolectal variety)

(B)   The basilectal variety (has many non-standard uses)

(C)   The standard variety/the acrolectal variety.

(D)   Other responses (These responses were those that were not anticipated and as such they will be written down by the researcher.)

An example from situation E in the structured questionnaire was a conversation with a friend regarding food and the canteen. In this task, the respondent was required to use a tag question and as such the possible responses that were prepared is shown below.

E5. *Your friend today was late for school and looks hungry. You think he has not taken his breakfast. Confirm with him.*

a. *You not yet have your breakfast right?*

b. *You not yet eat your breakfast, correct or not.*

c. *You haven't had your breakfast yet, have you?*

d. *Others_____*

The respondent did not see the structured questionnaire at all. It was felt that it would be best if the respondents did not see the expected responses or be given the options as the options given may not reflect their actual authentic responses.

The data from the preliminary study, gave insights into the topics the TGs discussed amongst their group. These situations were then used to construct the structured questionnaire.

Eight situations were formulated and they were as follows (refer to Appendix 2):

A.   Basic questions in a classroom (time, homework)

B.   Asking about an exam/test

C.   Asking about a friend or another person

D.   Asking about a new boy/girl in class

E.   Asking about food/recess time

F.   Asking about a teacher

G.   Asking about tuition

H.   Asking about the purchase of a book.

There were six question types in each situation and accordingly respondents were expected to use them:

1.   *wh* questions

2.   *yes/no* questions beginning with *is/are*

3.   *Yes/no* questions beginning with *has/have*

4.   positive tag questions

5.   negative tag questions

6.   questions in the reported speech

The questions were arranged according to the situations identified to make it easier for the interviewer to ask these questions (refer to Appendix 2).

3.4.1   IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

In most situations the researcher administered the questionnaire. The respondent sat with another TG member. The role of the second TG member was to act as a fellow interlocutor and as such the respondent answered looking at the second TG member, rather than the researcher. The purpose of the questionnaire was briefly explained so that the respondent asked the questions in the most natural manner. Each situation was explained as clearly as possible and if the response indicated that the respondent was unclear it was repeated. However, if the respondent was still unclear of the task, the interviewer continued with the next question. This was because too much of input from the interviewer would have influenced the TG's response. Such responses which were considered inappropriate were omitted from the research.

It was found that when the respondents were recorded they seemed to stop to answer and deliberated on the responses. Thus, recording was not used for analysis.

3.4.2   ANALYSIS OF THE STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

Each respondent had eight responses for each type of question. With 28 respondents, the total number of response for each type of question should have been 224. However, some of the responses cannot be identified as standard or non-standard structures. Thus, for the purpose of quantitative analysis, these responses were not used but were eliminated from the analysis. The responses were first categorized as standard or non-standard forms as discussed in chapter 2.4. The percentages of the standard responses were tabulated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Number of standard responses}}{\text{Total number of accepted responses}} \quad x \quad 100 \%$$

In the structured questionnaire, for each situation, questions 1, 2 and 3 are on *wh* questions, *yes/no* questions beginning with *is/are* and *has/have* respectively (refer to Appendix 2). Thus, they were categorized based on the non-standard use of these forms. In these questions, the non-standard structure is seen when a *wh* question does not have the frontal position, there is no inversion of the auxiliary and the subject in *yes/no* questions and there is an omission of the auxiliary in *wh* questions and *yes/no* questions. The use of particles was also examined. The percentages of the use of these particles in standard and non-standard forms were also calculated.

Question types 4 and 5 were on positive and negative tag questions. The tags used with these questions in particular the use of the word *right* were analysed. Question 6 was on questions in the indirect form. The analysis focuses on the inversion of the subject and the auxiliary. If inversion took place, the structure was considered a standard.

Finally, an individual assessment of the each TG member's verbal response in relation to the use of particles in the standard and non-standard question forms was plotted to see the actual trend in their verbal question forms.

Apart from the quantitative analysis, a qualitative analysis was done based on variations of all the responses received. The different use of particles and the various strategies employed by the DSE in forming questions were then examined.

3.4.3   CATEGORISING NON-STANDARD STRUCTURES

This study requires a clear distinction between what is SE and non-SE question forms. Although non-standard structures may be used, there is a consistency and underlying rules that govern these structures. This research aims to study the related question forms of the young DSE in informal situations. SE question forms were used when the DSE adhered to the standard grammar rules. When a question is syntactically the

standard form but the respondent uses a particle, the structure will still be considered a standard structure in this research.

Examples of variations from the standard that were considered to be non-standard forms were *wh* questions where the *wh* form was not at the frontal position of the questions, *yes/no* questions where the auxiliary and the subject were not inversed or an ellipsis of the auxiliary and 'questions in the indirect speech' where the word order was similar to the direct speech. Apart from that, the variations from the standard in tag questions consisted of the inappropriate tag that is using a particle, word (*no, right*) or phrase *(right or not, true or not)* other than the standard tag. When a respondent produced a *yes/no* question instead of the tag question, the response was considered inappropriate and it was omitted from the research.

3.5   THE TEST

Another aim of the research is to note if the TGs were able to use SE. A test is capable of showing one's highest variety and thus, in order to see if the TG is capable of using SE, a test on the various types of questions was conducted.

The test was conducted immediately after the structured questionnaire so that the respondents were not able to discuss the answers among themselves. The respondents were required to provide the most correct answer and as such it was assumed that the test would show the TG's highest variety. There was no time limit for the TG to complete the test as this would not reflect the respondents' ability in the language. However, while the test was conducted, discussion was not permitted.

3.5.1 THE STRUCTURE OF THE TEST

The structured questionnaire enabled the study of the respondents' verbal responses in forming *wh* questions, *yes/no* questions, tag questions and questions in the indirect form. Thus, based on the assumption that the test will indicate the respondents' highest variety, the questions in the written test were on these four types of questions (Appendix 3) to determine if standard forms of questions were used in the written test.

Section 1 consists of six yes/no questions. For each question, the TG members were to choose from the two given options of the standard structure and the non-standard structure where the auxiliary and the subject were not inversed. Section 2 consists of ten phrases, five positive and negative tag questions each with blank spaces at the end of each phrase. The TG members were asked to fill in the correct tags. In Section 3, the TG members were given five *wh* question forms. They were to form five different questions using these *wh* forms. Finally, in Section 4, five questions in the direct speech were given and the TG members were required to change them into the indirect speech.

3.5.2 ANALYSIS OF THE ANSWERS TO THE TEST RESULTS

All written responses have to firstly be categorised as *standard* or *non-standard* question form. Only then were the results quantified in percentages.

$$\frac{\text{Number of standard response}}{\text{The total number of responses}} \quad x \quad 100 \%$$

Analysis of the responses in Section 1 was done to identify if the TG is able to distinguish the standard forms of *yes/no* questions. This section of the test was done to indicate if the TG was able to identify that the non inversion of the auxiliary and the subject was non-standard. If they were able to identify the standard forms, the answer was

considered 'correct'. As there were 28 TG members and six questions in Section 1, there was a total of 168 responses in this section.

In Section 2, the correct tag would require a respondent to firstly identify whether to use a positive or a negative tag. Then the respondent should be able to identify the correct auxiliary and pronoun to use to form the tag. Only then will the answer be considered the standard form. With ten tag questions in this section, there were a total of 280 responses.

In Section 3 the respondents were required to form five *wh* questions. There were a total of 140 responses in this section. When the TG constructed a *wh* question with the *wh* form at the frontal position without ellipsis of the auxiliary, the response was considered SE. The purpose of the questions was to identify if the TG starts the question with the *wh* form or if they drop the auxiliary when they construct questions.

Section 4 of the test identified the TG's ability to inverse the auxiliary and the subject when constructing questions in the reported speech. There were five questions in this section and as such there were a total of 140 responses. The individual test scores were converted into percentages for every section and this was also compared to examine if a particular pattern was consistent among respondents.

Finally, the percentages of the test results were compared to the percentages of the verbal responses. This was done to examine their use of SE in the formal and informal situations and to indicate whether the respondents were capable of moving along the lectal cline.

3.6   CONCLUSION

This chapter outlined the methodology used in eliciting the data for this study. The research was carried out using a personal questionnaire to identify the TG members and the structured questionnaire to identify the TG's question forms and its pragmatics. Finally the test is used to show the TG's highest variety.

In the next chapter the results of the personal questionnaire and the structured questionnaire will be presented and discussed.