CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This study will explore issues related to the language learning/acquisition process among foreign waiters. More specifically, this study seeks to investigate the communication difficulties foreign waiters face during the first few months upon arrival in the host country and the strategies they use to overcome these difficulties in order to communicate for work purposes despite their limited proficiency in the target language. In carrying out this study a qualitative approach in the data collection and analysis procedures will be mainly employed. Some simple descriptive quantification will also be used in the analysis of responses obtained from the two interview forms.

Moreover, the research structure comprises library research, interviews and fieldwork. This study, however, chooses as its own defining quality a research strategy which is more empirical in nature. It is an inquiry that investigates the use of communication strategies used by three waiters within the real-life context of a restaurant. Descriptive statistics and the small number of individuals under observation make this research a case study which explores the use of communication strategies by three waiters in a restaurant in Kuala Lumpur.

3.1 Participants

The participants comprise three Bangladeshi waiters in the food service industry (waiters). They have been selected to participate based on the following criteria:

- **Their native language is other than English, Malay or bahasa Indonesia**.

  This is important to assess the English language learning and acquisition in natural setting in addition to the fact that the participants' ability to speak Malay or bahasa Indonesia would definitely affect their interest and need to learn English as they would be able to instead communicate through these languages.

- **Have low educational qualification (primary or lower secondary education)**

  This criterion is important in the sample selection, as it would ensure that the participants are foreign waiters who had been in low-income employment in their home country. It is the contention of this study that with this criterion, foreign waiters with the sole intention of job seeking will be identified and that their drive to improve their English proficiency is based on their desire to improve their job status. This criterion is also related to the next criterion that concerns the medium of instruction. However, as stated earlier the participants in the present study are from Bangladesh and they have had their schooling in the educational structure[12] of their country of origin.

- **Have had limited English language instruction in their home country**

  This criterion excludes foreign waiters who have taken English courses or have obtained the language because the medium of instruction at their schools had been English. When placed in an environment like Malaysia where English is widely spoken, their previous exposure to English would make it easier for them to improve their proficiency in the

[12] According to the Ministry of Education of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh: "Education in Bangladesh has three major stages-primary, secondary and higher educations. Primary education is a 5-year cycle while secondary education is a 7- year one with three sub-stages: 3 years of junior secondary, 2 years of secondary and 2 years of higher secondary. The entry age for primary is 6 years. The junior, secondary and higher stages are designed for age groups 11-13, 14-15 and 16-17 years. Higher secondary is followed by graduate level education in general, technical, engineering, agriculture, business studies, and medical streams requiring 5-6 years to obtain a Masters degree." Retrieved from: http://www.moedu.gov.bd

language. However, since the participants are from Bangladesh it is very important whether they had been to private or governmental schools[13].

Hence, this study seeks participants who are driven to learn English with a limited knowledge of the English language from before. Moreover, this study investigates the ways the waiters learn on the job and from their daily interactions.

- **Have been in Malaysia for no more than a month**

  This criterion is of a great importance as they would have had limited opportunities to acquire the target language, and hence would have more communication difficulties and more frequent need to use "compensating" communication strategies. Although age and gender are not the focus of this study, participants' age upon arrival and gender are also recorded to supplement the findings. As such, Table 3.1 summarizes the profile of the three participants selected for this study.

Table 3.1 Profile of the participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Years of schooling	Highest educational qualification obtained	How long since arrival	Job
A	Male	32	2	Primary school	21 days	Waiter
B	Male	28	8	Secondary school	14 days	Waiter
C	Male	31	5	Primary school	28 days	Waiter

[13] In Bangladesh, "at all levels of schooling, students can choose to receive their education in English or Bengali. Private schools tend to make use of English-based study media while government-sponsored schools use Bengali." Retrieved from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Education_in_Bangladesh

3.2 Instruments

The instruments employed in this study are the two Informal Interview Protocols and Observation Schedule. In order to assess the participants' English Language proficiency level at the beginning of the data collection period and after four months of observation, the iBT TOEFL scale will be used since it is designed to assess non- English speakers' ability to use and understand English. The following sections will describe each of these instruments in detail.

3.2.1 The First Interview Protocol

The first Interview Protocol, which was administered at the beginning of the data-gathering period, contained questions about the participants' personal details, their educational and linguistic backgrounds, their work experience, their job expectations, their employment plans, their perception and attitude towards English and the communication difficulties they have faced so far and how they handled these difficulties. Moreover, since the questions in the first interview protocol were in English, a Bangladeshi interpreter who could translate from English to Bengali and vice versa was employed to help the participants overcome any probable breakdowns in the course of the communication due to their limited proficiency in English.

However, the writer of the present study is an Iranian national who speaks Persian and who also speaks English with a little bit of Persian accent. Therefore care was taken to make sure that this would not make a serious problem for the participants to understand the questions fully since they had not been exposed to differing English accents. This was also among the reasons to have a Bangladeshi interpreter around while interviewing the participants.

The information gathered from this interview is necessary to establish a complete picture and idea about the participants. Participants' motivations, expectations and needs are all considered to be important influences on language acquisition. The educational background and the level of education are the bases from which the participants can start the learning process and are of great influence on the rate of improvement and language progress. These factors, therefore, are included in the interview protocols. This study focuses on establishing a direct relationship between each individual criteria and English language acquisition in a natural setting, in order to come up with recommendations for the best environment and circumstances for language acquisition. The interview protocol is attached as Appendix 1. The information obtained from the interview will then be supplemented with information gathered from the observation sessions.

3.2.2 The Observation Schedule

The observation sessions focused on communication breakdowns and the strategies participants used to repair these breakdowns: different body language expressions and hand signs, asking for help from a senior colleague, language switching and using some words or phrases from the mother language, or even using some English words or phrases obtained from a previous exposure. Previously in the literature review a typology of the different communication strategies was presented. It shows that there is no joint unity as to define them and they are many in number.

Moreover, a pilot experiment was carried out before launching the main research. It was a small scale preliminary study conducted prior to the main research, in order to check the feasibility and to improve the design of the research. The pilot experiment made it easier to: firstly, locate the proper restaurant for the observation; secondly, decide on the number of participants for the purpose of observation; and thirdly specify the most communication strategies used by the participants. When the restaurant was located and the probable participants were identified, the participants were observed for a few hours. From among the communication strategies discussed in the literature review some seemed to be used frequently by the participants whenever facing problems in their communications. Therefore, to serve the purpose of the observation, according to the notes taken from the preliminary exploration four sets of communications strategies, which were most probable to happen frequently in the restaurant, were chosen. However, for the ease and accuracy of the observation, only strategies with highest frequency[14] in the communication events in the restaurant were chosen. They are grouped as follows:

Strategy 1: Use of time gaining strategies and all-purpose words (e.g., long pauses, saying fillers like “em”, “er”, and using “this”, “that”)

Strategy 2: Use of nonlinguistic means (i.e., body language, miming and facial expressions)

Strategy 3: Code switching (also known as language switching)

Strategy 4: Appealing for help (e.g., asking for help from a senior colleague or asking for meaning)

The observation protocol was designed to facilitate data gathering during the observation sessions (see Appendix 2a).

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[14] Communication strategies with low frequency (less than five times here) were practically not considered.

3.2.3 The Second Interview Protocol

After the four-month observation was over, participants were interviewed for the second time. The second interview focuses on the participants' efforts at improving their English language proficiency, their perception of the success of these efforts, the problems they face at work (i.e., their limited ability to communicate in the target language). Moreover, participants reported on the reality of the expectations they had four months ago about the amount of communication they would be required to perform. The Second Interview Protocol is produced as Appendix 3.

3.2.4 The English Language Proficiency Test

The grading process for participants' English language speaking proficiency follows the iBT TOEFL Independent Speaking Rubrics. It is a grading scale designed to evaluate a non-English speaking person's ability to use and understand English in guided scale setting (see Appendix 4).

Participants are first assessed based on their ability to use the English language. It is done through the iBT TOEFL speaking component, which is a standardized evaluation tool designed to determine their proficiency when they first arrived in order to compare it with their proficiency after four months. It is used mainly as a selection criterion whereby only new arrivals with none or low proficiency in English are selected to participate in the study. The importance of choosing the iBT TOEFL[15] scoring standards here is firstly due to the strong credibility of the test in the academic world. Secondly, among the TOEFL tests administered only the new generation iBT TOEFL has a speaking test component. The iBT

[15] According to ETS (Educational Testing Service) TOEFL "test is the most widely respected English-language test in the world, recognized by more than 7,500 colleges, universities and agencies in more than 130 countries." Retrieved from : http://www.ets.org/toefl

scoring standards for the speaking component[16] are applied for the sole purpose of more accuracy and credibility in the analysis of the results. For a sophisticated evaluation of the level of oral English proficiency of the participants, the independent task evaluation is followed since there are no other skills (i.e. reading or listening) integrated in the interview and the participants will be asked to perform the independent task of answering the pre-planned questions in the interview forms. Nevertheless, the interviews do not look like an iBT test and the participants will not do the questions at a push.

They will be studied and evaluated in the way of their ability in describing their personal experiences and preferences while answering the questions in English. The descriptions in the guide to Independent Speaking Rubrics[17] will be closely followed to check on the General Description of the demanded task. This specifically looks into the responses to see if the participants get around the topic at all and/or if they are able to accomplish what is demanded by the task in an intelligible manner. This, in turn, however, puts the burden of proof on the following criteria:

Delivery: This will check on the participants' clarity and flow of speech. This criterion will test the pauses in the course of speech, pronunciation as well as intonation.

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[16] The iBT speaking section: "consists of six tasks: two independent tasks and four integrated tasks. In the two independent tasks, test-takers answer opinion questions on familiar topics. They are evaluated on their ability to speak spontaneously and convey their ideas clearly and coherently. In two of the integrated tasks, test-takers read a short passage, listen to an academic course lecture or a conversation about campus life and answer a question by combining appropriate information from the text and the talk. In the two remaining integrated tasks, test-takers listen to an academic course lecture or a conversation about campus life and then respond to a question about what they heard. In the integrated tasks, test-takers are evaluated on their ability to appropriately synthesize and effectively convey information from the reading and listening material. Test-takers may take notes as they read and listen and may use their notes to help prepare their responses. Test-takers are given a short preparation time before they have to begin speaking." Retrieved from: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/TOEFL

[17] The Independent Speaking Rubrics (scoring standards) for the iBT/Next Generation TOEFL Test will appear as Appendix 4.

Language Use: This criterion looks at the effective use of grammar rules and vocabulary in the course of speech. In addition, this will check on the automaticity of the participant in terms of mastery over the language structures which result in grammatically and semantically well-formed sentences.

Topic Development: This yardstick tests the participants' ability to maintain the discussion on the topic and develop it through making coherent connections between ideas on the topics that come in succession.

However, heed is taken to administer the interviews at the presence of an interpreter for any event of a breakdown in the interview. The presence of the interpreter is more reasonable when the participants are first interviewed, for they are at the time new to Malaysia and their level of English proficiency is equivocal.

3.3 Data Gathering Procedures

The first interview protocol (Appendix 1) was administered at the beginning of the study, as soon as the participants were identified using the sample selection criteria discussed in Section 3.1. A number of restaurants were surveyed until the number of participants who matched the criteria was obtained. Eventually all the three participants were chosen from one restaurant. Once the selected waiters signed consent to participate in this study, they were interviewed using Interview Form 1. As the participants were expected not to be able to communicate in English, the interviews were conducted with the help of an interpreter. As for the restrictions (i.e., time and resources) on the present research, the waiters chosen were all working in the same restaurant.

The Observation sessions started soon after the first interview was carried over and they were continued for four consecutive months. The Observation sessions were carried out as soon as the participants were assigned by the restaurant manager to serve customers. During each observation session, an observation form was used to record the participants' use of communication strategies mentioned in Section 3.2.2. In the observation sessions, participants' use of English is also recorded. These records show a gradual inclination of the participants to communicate more in English as their command of the language keeps a slow and gradual pace. Participants were observed eight times over the four-month period; each observation session was one hour long. At the end of the four-month period, the Second Interview was conducted and all the data gathered were analyzed accordingly.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The data obtained from the observations was categorized and analyzed qualitatively based on the themes listed in the two interviews (as listed in Section 3.2). Simple frequency counts and percentages was calculated on part of the data--such as the number of times particular strategies are used and its specific relationship to the overall proficiency improvement. Therefore, after each observation the most used communication strategies were identified for the purpose of their categorization in the analysis. In addition, for the ease of analysis, each observation session, which lasted one hour, was divided into six equal parts of ten minutes.

The aim was to closely monitor the participants to observe the way they managed their communication in general and to see what were the strategies used in each ten-minute time chunk. The number of strategies used was marked as slashes (each slash for one time use of anyone of the strategies) in the Appendix 2a forms. After calculating the number of strategies used in each session, they numbers were transferred to the Appendix number 3 to check for the most frequently used strategies used by all of the participants.

3.5 Summary

This study was conducted with the aim of evaluating the English language learning and acquisition strategies in an informal setting. This chapter explains the methods used in this study and includes a detailed description of the participants, materials, data gathering and data analysis procedures. The next chapter presents a description and an analysis of the data obtained from the interview forms and observations sessions.