

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design which encompasses the method of data elicitation and the method of data analysis. The research design for the present study is fundamentally ethnographical in nature. It adopts the ethnographical approach which “allows an openness to categories and modes of thought and behaviour which may not have been anticipated by the investigator” (Saville-Troike, 1982 : 3). As this study is concerned with the strategies of code switching adopted by the participants, data was gathered during formal meetings and then analyzed.

Ethnographical research involves the collection, description and interpretation of the data, after which the categorization of the findings takes place. In this study, the primary data consists of natural conversations among Company X professionals during meetings and the secondary data consists of information obtained through the administration of questionnaires and brief interview sessions with the participants in an attempt at triangulation to increase the validity of the findings.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

As mentioned in Chapter 2, section 2.6, earlier work undertaken by various researchers such as Zentella (1997), Gumperz (1982), Wong (1979) and Noor Azlina (1979), in their study of the conversational functions of code switching, form the basis of this study

3.2 Research Design and Instruments

3.2.1 Meetings

The 3 meetings recorded were held in the Company X Headquarters based in Kuala Lumpur. Meeting 1 was called to discuss about a survey to be conducted in Company X. The survey was to assess how effective improvement initiatives have been and how they have been accepted by the staff. Information was put on the board and

discussions were centred around it. Meeting 2 took place in the General Manager's room and the participants were reviewing a report submitted by another company to Company X and identifying areas of improvement. Participants of Meeting 3 discussed about projects being undertaken by Company X. The status of various projects and the value creation for each project was reviewed prior to the management committee meeting. The projects were reviewed department by department.

3.2.2 Questionnaire

Copies of a questionnaire were distributed to the fourteen participants at the end of the meetings – four from Meeting 1, four from Meeting 2 and six from Meeting 3 to obtain personal information about the participants. In addition, their preferred language for various conversational discourse was identified and analysed to assist in determining the participants' reasons for code switching.

Questions one to four asked for information regarding age, position and background of the participants and helped in profiling the participants while questions five to eight provided an inkling on their language choice during informal situations or when speaking to people close to them. Questions ten to thirteen provided data related to their language choice in undertaking various routine transactions while question nine threw some light on the medium of interaction throughout their academic life and workplace. This could have a bearing on their choice of language for communication (see Appendix A).

3.2.3 Interviews

The researcher conducted interviews with the participants of the meetings to ascertain the various reasons for code switching. The researcher met the participants individually and spent about 30 minutes with each of them. These sessions were conducted after transcribing the recordings of the meetings, and identifying and analyzing the code switches. Each participant was shown the transcript of the meeting they attended and their attention was drawn to the "code switches" made by them.

3.3 Subjects

The subjects are all bilingual or multilingual professionals from three departments of Company X. As these professionals are from various national, educational, social and ethnic backgrounds, it was felt that they were representative of multinational companies' staff population. The participants consisted of both management and executive staff. Out of the fourteen participants, eight were Malays, two Chinese, one Indian, one Iban, one Irish and one Argentinean.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

This research was carried out after written permission had been obtained from Company X. Company X was informed that recordings will be made of meetings attended by the researcher. Assurance was given that the transcripts and recordings will be provided to company X for them to vet the data collected to ensure no confidential information was released.

Data was obtained by **recording** the proceedings of **three formal meetings** conducted at Company X. The meetings were attended by executives of three departments of Company X, i.e. Strategic Planning, Capability Development and Business Development Departments. The duration of each meeting was about an hour and this accounted for three hours of recordings. At the end of each meeting a **questionnaire** was given to each participant. The completed questionnaires were collected a week later and information gathered analysed. To gather additional details and clarification the researcher **interviewed** the participants of the meeting after transcribing the recordings of the meetings.

The primary data which were natural conversations during formal meetings were recorded using a Sony IC Recorder. Three hours of conversation was recorded as it provided a sufficient corpus for the purpose of this study. Two recordings were carried out in the meeting rooms of Company X and one in the General Manager's room.

The data collected was transcribed for the purpose of analysis. The recordings were repeatedly played to ensure the transcriptions were error free.

Prior to the recording, permission of the participants to record the conversation was obtained. The recorder was placed at the centre of a round table, around which the participants sat. After each meeting, the recordings were played back to the participants to keep them informed of exactly what was recorded as certain topics discussed during the meetings could have been confidential. They were told of the aims of the project but most of the time during the meetings they appeared to be unhindered by the recordings. They had the right to say which parts of the recording could be used as data for the study in keeping with the ethics of this type of research.

The principal system of transcription used for conversation analysis was developed by Gail Jefferson in 1985. A modified version of this system was used for this research as the focus was on instances of code switching and not on other paralinguistic features. The other rule about not altering the data in any way was also adhered to.

Data were also obtained through the use of questionnaires and interview sessions after the recordings mainly to augment or confirm the findings obtained through the primary data. To begin with, a questionnaire was used to elicit relevant personal information about the participants, like age and educational level, and their linguistic background and their language preferences in certain situations. The questionnaires proved to be useful when the participants' reasons for code switching were being determined. The information gathered through this mean was treated confidentially, and the participants remained nameless throughout the transcription and discussion. Prior to the actual data gathering, the questionnaire was piloted to establish the validity of the questionnaire.

Brief interview sessions were held with the participants to elicit personal information which further contributed to the analysis. Prior to the interview sessions all

three recordings were transcribed and the transcripts were shown to the relevant participants during the interview. The interview session was important to gain insight to the reasons for their linguistic behavior.

3.5 Pilot Study

A pilot study was undertaken one week prior to the commencement of the study proper. Ten staff of Company X who attend meetings regularly were selected. A questionnaire was provided to these participants. The significance of the pilot study was to guide the researcher in the construction of logical and practical questions, thus assisting in the enhancement of the questionnaire.

A meeting was held with the Human Resource Manager of Company X to identify the meetings that could be recorded, the schedule of meetings and the venue of the meetings. The discussion with the Human Resource Manager was recorded with her approval. This enabled the researcher to ascertain whether the recordings were clear and could be transcribed.

3.6 Data Analysis

Recorded meeting proceedings were analysed for instances of code switching. This was undertaken by “listening” attentively to the three recordings of the meetings which lasted approximately 60 minutes each. The participants’ conversations were “listened to” for code switches. These switches were then transcribed and analysed according to the frequency of code switching, the functions of code switching and their occurrence. The participants who code switched were also identified. This process was repeated to ensure the transcriptions were accurate reflections of the conversations.

Once the primary data were collected and transcribed, they were ready for analysis. The prominent switches were identified and from the nature of the switch and the context in which the particular switch occurred, the functions the code switches fulfilled were put forward with reference to other similar studies on this topic (refer to

section 2.3). The frequency and functions attributed to the switches were listed to determine whether a pattern emerged.

The switches were grouped according to the functions of the switch and the frequency of such occurrence was calculated. For example, switches which occurred for “economy of articulation” were grouped together and put under the category of “economy” and the frequency of such occurrences were computed.

The questionnaire and interview results were analysed to fill in some of the gaps in the information which the primary data alone could not account for. This is because, apart from the conversational discourse of the participants, it is also crucial to get information on the participant’s background which were achieved through the questionnaire and interview.