# CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION

## 1.0 Introduction

Malaysia has now established itself as a country that has achieved industrialization more rapidly than many of its counterparts in Asia. Supported by strong economic growth, the labour market has enjoyed near full employment. Nonetheless, unemployment rate in this country remain a cause of worry; shifting from 2 to 3.5% since mid 90's and the percentage has since then increased to 3.8% by 2009 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2009). Despite expanding employment opportunities in the job market, the unemployment rate has consistently increased in recent years.

Unemployment amongst graduates appears to be on the rise with approximately 30,000 Malaysian graduates jobless (*Utusan Malaysia*, 30 June 2010). According to Shamsudin Bardan, Executive Director of Malaysian Employers Federation, a more likely explanation for the rise in graduate unemployment could be due to the changing economy that is now anchored in the services sector. "Being reliant on services means employers require people who not only have knowledge but who possess the "soft-skills" as well people who can communicate effectively, analyze and solve problems efficiently" (*New Sunday Times*, 20 March2005).

Related to the above statement, failure to perform well in employment interviews may be seen to be contributing to graduates failing to secure jobs. This is because according to Susan M. Heatfield of About.Com Human Resources, employment interviews are still regarded as a powerful tool to assess potential employees (http://about.com/careers, 2010). As more employers are searching for graduates with good academic achievement and possessing 'soft skills' such as communication skills and interpersonal skills (Nurita, et.al, 2004), employment interviews have now taken similar trajectory to assess these qualities possessed by candidates.

As pointed out by Dr. S. Subramaniam, Minister at the Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia, local graduates have been said to be rather docile or even timid in seizing opportunities when placed in competitive circumstances (*Jawapan Soalan Dewan Rakyat*, 30 June 2010). One such example of competitive circumstances is the employment interview. Numerous reasons have been cited to account for this timid demeanour and disposition that have been said to be a handicap to many Malaysian graduates. This predicament is said to be even more apparent amongst female graduates.

Much has been said today regarding the need of Malaysian graduates to equip themselves and be much more confident in 'promoting' or 'marketing' themselves for employment. To this end, this study is set to investigate if, in local setting, it supports the notion that suggests that both male and female graduates enter the workforce at levels comparable and similar credentials and that this seems to diverge soon after that interview point (Morrison et al., 1987).

Therefore, this study intends to ascertain the various mode, manner and style of communication patterns employed by both female and male candidates in a series of employment interview conducted by one particular company. This study considers it essential to determine the differences in communication styles and strategies employed by both female and male candidates as these differences can affect the outcome of the interview.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Malaysia is currently facing a crucial problem of unemployment amongst the local graduates. It is rather alarming to note that although the number of female undergraduates exceeds that of the males by 23% (Statistics by MOHE, 2008) unemployment rate among female graduates is significantly higher than that of their male counterparts.

As these graduates go through the process of being interviewed before securing a job, this case study is set to provide invaluable insights in the communication patterns and strategies used by candidates during employment interviews in efforts to present themselves as "the better candidate" for the position applied. Consequently, the intent of this study is to investigate and analyze the features of language used in job interviews and to ascertain which differences in communication styles employed by different genders contribute to the successful outcome at interviews. It is hoped that with these findings perhaps this study is able highlight what companies look for in interviews and which linguistic features demonstrated by the subjects of this study may be considered to be more successful – "success" being defined in this study as positive comments made by panel of interviewers

for all candidates and the successful candidate in the series of interviews carried out in this study.

In a reply statement to a question asked during a meeting in the House of Representatives, the Human Resource Minister, Dr. S. Subramaniam, informed that among the main factors that contribute to high unemployment rate amongst Malaysian graduates include the lack of communication skills, survival skills as well as 'soft-skills'.

Indeed unemployment amongst graduates has been a critical issue of late and the problem has even been a heated topic of debate in the House of Parliament.  As the unemployment rate amongst female graduates is higher than that of their male counterparts (Statistics from Human Resource Ministry 2010) many have drawn a simple conclusion that female graduates do not fare well in employment interviews.

Research has shown that in women's effort to downplay their abilities and accomplishments, they often use certain language patterns that damage their credibility with employers such as hedges and qualifiers to soften the impact of their words (Bloomfield, 2005).  Women also tend to phrase statements as questions that very often leave the impression of uncertainty and lack of confidence.

Interestingly however, a study conducted by RodiahIdris (2009) found that it was the female students in her study who had better 'soft-skills' as compared to the male students. It is, therefore, rather pertinent for the researcher to identify and distinguish in this study the communication patterns of both male and female candidates during a job interview and attempt to draw the relationship between these patterns and the outcome of the employment

interview. A successful interview is one that ultimately warrants employment for the successful candidate. A successful interview is also being characterized here as having the most number of positive feedback and remarks from the panel of interviewers whilst a successful candidate is identified as one who is ultimately hired by the hiring company.

By analysing the conversational and interactive patterns of the interviewers and the candidates, the researcher hopes to uncover some underlying relationships between gender and language in an employment interview, particularly in relations to self-marketing strategies. According to Ryan (2000), America's number one interview coach, candidates should never fail to remember that in a job search "**the product is you!**" Hence, unless a candidate is able to market herself effectively, employing the most convincing communication style, chances are one could easily be forgotten long before stepping out of the interview room.

Therefore, the main thrust of the issue at hand that the researcher wishes to draw attention to is the different communication style and linguistic strategies, if any, employed by female and male interview candidates. It is even more pertinent for the researcher to investigate if there is any relationship between these differences in communication pattern and the outcome of the interview; in particular which communication pattern has a positive impact on the outcome of the interview.

This study hopes to be able to present the preferred communication style that interview panellists in this case study look for in a candidate. These are findings that subsequently would provide insights for Malaysian graduates to work on in improving their communication skills and better prepare themselves for an employment interview.

## 1.2 Objectives of the Study

Using a series of job interviews conducted by a company as a case study, the objectives of the study are:

1. To investigate the linguistics features used in employment interviews. This covers those uttered by panellists as well as the candidates in a series of interviews carried out in this case study.

2. To explore thedifference in linguistic features employed by both male as well as female candidates in aseries of interviews and its impact on their success of securing a job.

3. To identify the preferred communicative style for employment interviews for female and male candidates in this study that resulted in the success of securing the job.

The above objectives will enable the study to identify communication styles that interview panellists find most worthy of note amongst the candidates.  Based on feedback by interview panellists, it is hoped that the study will be able to draw a relationship between the differences in communication styles and the outcome of the interviews.  This is certainly the most important element to be highlighted in this case study as panellists' views  would provide invaluable insights on what may or may not work or be acceptable in the series of interviews carried out.

## 1.3    Research Questions

The research questions for this study are:

1.  What are the linguistic features employed by both candidates and panellists during job interviews?

2.  In what ways are the linguistic features employed by male and female candidates different?

3.  How are these differences in the communication patterns of candidates related to the outcome of the interviews?

4.   Which communicative styles and strategies are considered to be most preferable by interview panellists during an employment interview?

## 1.4    Significance of the Study

As unemployment rate among Malaysian women are significantly higher in comparison to that of Malaysian men (*Star Online*, 29 June 2010), this study hopes to identify significant bearings for young graduates, especially females, the preferred communication patterns or styles that they should employ and pitfalls that they should avoid during an employment interview.

It is also hoped that the findings of this study would set in motion efforts to minimize the gap between employers' expectations and graduates' perceptions especially when they are put to test in an employment interview. As job interviews reflect employers' requirements as well as expectations, it would indeed be crucial that candidates bring along with them employability skills that are much required by employers today.  To this end, findings of

this study may essentially point out areas that need to be improved in order to increase graduates' chances of employment in the future.

At school level, findings of this research may assist in the development of modules for communication skills. It can also further support the need for creating awareness of employability skills by highlighting the communication patterns and strategies that would take students a long way in an employment interview. Creating awareness of these skills at an early age would certainly give them the edge over others as skills need time to be mastered. Perhaps the findings may also be incorporated in programmes targeted for female graduates to overcome the notion that they do not perform as well as their male counterparts.

Results of this study would also be able to zero in on the communication problems faced by graduates, both males and females, during an employment interview. This certainly could serve as signpost of pitfalls that they should avoid in an employment interview and could be incorporated in a communication syllabus for EOP (English for Other Purposes) courses at the tertiary level.

Essentially, findings that show similarities or differences of linguistic features demonstrated by the candidates may be reflective of different linguistic styles of different genders and these could be highlighted by trainers/teachers in preparing employable human resources of the future.

## 1.5    Summary

Better employment opportunities await Malaysian graduates. However, unemployment especially amongst the female graduates is still at an alarming rate. As job interviews are the first hurdle towards employment, there is a dire need for graduates, more importantly female graduates, to know the right self-marketing strategies and effective communication styles.

There is certainly a gap between employers' expectation and requirement as opposed to graduates' perceptions of what to be expected of them. It is certainly during employment interviews that employers are able to gauge the skills that the graduates have and failing to demonstrate those skills during the short span of time that graduates have during the interview would end undesirably.   Hence, this chapter has presented the research aims of the present study to investigate the above.

# CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

## 2.0     Introduction

This chapter presents the related literature that forms the underpinnings of this study. Theoretical contributions for this study are derived from several research perspectives namely, that of pragmatics and communication patterns. It specifically examines the concept of relational communication which includes persuasive communication and the employment of effective linguistic features in enhancing the dynamics of communication that is guided by rules of interaction.

In defining the parameter of this study, this chapter puts into focus literature on communication theories and researches;  namely in the area of language and gender that form the theoretical backdrop for the evaluative study of women and men communicative differences.

## 2.1     Theory of Communication

The complexity of communication is often underrated. Many find theories of natural sciences like physics and chemistry somewhat difficult and complex and develop the mistaken attitude that communication is a relatively simple matter. On the contrary, communication events are much more complicated than those studied in the natural sciences (Bormann, 1986). Taking for granted what seemed like an effortless task, most

students only come to realize, in their first job interview, the complexity of it all when trying to present themselves as a person and a commodity at the same time. This is where persuasive communication comes into play.

### 2.1.1 Persuasive Communication

According to Bormann (1986), no aspect of communication is more important to our daily lives than persuasion. Employment interview, for one, is packed with messages with persuasive intent where communication is intended to influence choice. Early definitions of persuasive communication focused on the sources of messages and on persuader's skill and art in building a speech. Larson (2001) postulates that persuasion occurs only through cooperation between source and receiver. He then expanded on this definition and describes *persuasion* as the co-creation of a state of identification between a source and a receiver that results from the use of *symbols*. Symbols here indicate words used as means to identify the receiver with the clear intent of the source.

Symbol making includes the art of using language be it verbal, written, pictorial or even gestural and analyzing these symbols which are used or misused by persuaders would enable us to get to the essence of persuasive meanings. Language is indeed a powerful tool in determining the persuaders' success in achieving their goals and intents by means of influencing others. Eloquence or communicative competence communicates a dynamic personality and is very much an essence in determining success in persuasive communication. This is because the person who can find the right word at the right time and who can express an idea clearly and with interesting examples or analogies draws attention and interest (Bormann, 1986).

Another powerful force of persuasion is the speaker's deep personal conviction that he or she is right (McRae, 1998). The first person a good sales representative should persuade, for example, are themselves. The same scenario applies for job applicants, in which, they should first believe in their self-worthiness before they can persuade and convince others to do so.

All interviews have a persuasive component. In most employment interviews mutual persuasion is involved, namely, the interviewers seeks to 'sell' the company and the job and the interviewee seeks to persuade the employer that he or she is the best candidate for the job (Barone, 1995). Persuasive communication is, however, essentially dependent on a person's interpersonal and communicative skills. According to Wood (2000), it is by means of having **communicative competence** that we are to communicate functionally and interactively in achieving our various goals in communication which includes higher communicative skills such as the act of persuasion and negotiation.

## 2.2    Communicative Competence

Defining communicative competence can be quite a tricky endeavour. This is due to the simple fact that too much has been said about it by too many people; from psychologists to linguists and even anthropologists. In place of the absence of a specific definition, communicative competence is often associated with the ability to communicate appropriately in the target language which covers not only the knowledge and skills of the surface structure of the language namely, the grammatical or linguistic forms, but includes the knowledge of when, where and to whom it is appropriate to use these forms (Halizah

Othman, 2003). In other words, a person can be said to be communicatively competent when he or she knows exactly what to say, when to say it and to whom he or she wants to say it to.

In 1980, Canale and Swain conducted an extensive survey on the evaluation of communicative competence in French as a second language for school children in the province of Ontario, Canada. Their purpose was to develop a theoretical framework for subsequent curriculum design that includes communication approach in language teaching. They eventually came up with a recommendation of a framework that has proven over time to be worthy of consideration in assessing communicative competence as it brings together the various views of communicative competence. The four components of communicative competence that form the parameters of this Communicative Competence framework are *grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence,* and *strategic competence.* These four components suggest a model of communicative competence that makes evaluation and assessment of it much more achievable.

### 2.2.1   Grammatical Competence

Grammatical competence is 'linguistic competence' in the restricted sense of the term. It is associated with one's mastery of the linguistic code and the ability to recognize the *lexical, morphological, syntactic,* and *phonological* features of a language (Savignon 1983). A person is said to have grammatical competence when he or she is able to not only recognise the linguistic code and structure of a language but is also able to manipulate these features to form words and sentences. Thus, a person is said to demonstrate grammatical

competence not by merely having knowledge of the rule of a language but by applying the rule effectively.

## 2.2.2 Sociolinguistic Competence

Socioliguistic competence is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry having to do with the social rules of language use (Hymes, 1974). The essence of it is derived from the term 'appropriateness' which goes beyond knowing *what* to say in a situation and *how* to say it but also knowing when to remain silent or incompetent. Saville-Troike (1982), cites examples from several communities where speaking in a bumbling and hesitating manner is appropriate when one is speaking with those of perceived higher rank. The same concept of 'appropriateness' can be observed in situations where L2 speakers try not to sound too much like a native speaker for fear of appearing intrusive or conversely disloyal from the perspective of the speakers' own L1 community.

In another instance encountered by Savignon (1983), similar observation can be made for differences in dialects. A white girl trying to sound and emulate the speech of that of an Afro-American classmate was given a piece of hard advice to 'never try to sound like us' ever again. This 'overstepping' of social or linguistic boundaries may result in serious miscommunication and thus, knowledge on culture and context are most paramount in developing sociolinguistic competence. Although there is an inadequate description of sociocultural rules of appropriateness, successful L2 users are said to be socio linguistically competent when they have a sense of the proper distance to be maintained, ways in which

that distance is signaled and manner of which these intercultural communication to be dealt with (Savignon 1983).

### 2.2.3   Discourse Competence

Discourse competence is concerned not only with the interpretation of isolated sentences but also with the connection of a series of sentences or utterances to form a meaningful whole. Recognising the theme or topic of a paragraph, chapter or book or getting the gist of a telephone conversation, poem, television commercials, office memo, recipe, or legal document requires discourse competence (Savignon, 1983). Success in both cases is dependent on the knowledge shared by the writer/speaker and the reader/hearer knowledge of the real world, knowledge of the linguistic code, knowledge of the discourse structure, and the knowledge of the social setting. Within the context of this study, it is essentially the ability to respond appropriately to the communicative requirements of the interview, including demonstrating strategic competence.

### 2.2.4   Strategic Competence

Strategic competence is the ability to know the appropriate strategy to be used in an attempt to avoid communication breakdown. Rephrasing, repetition, emphasis, seeking clarification, circumlocution, avoidance (of words, structures, topics) and even message modification are among the strategies used to meet the demands of ongoing communication. A person is said to have strategic competence when he/she is able to deal with situations that require him/her to provide, not only appropriate but also relevant responses that are the key determinant for a successful communication. The dialogues

below illustrate the importance of strategic competence. Examples are excerpted from transcripts of an employment interview carried out by RoslizaRosli (2005) in her pilot study on "Communication Strategies Employed by Fresh Graduates in an Employment Interview, of which she was an indirect participant.

**Sample Excerpt**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Interviewer | : | Tell us about your greatest passion. |
| Candidate | : | Uhmmm … Expression…? |
| Interviewer | : | Passion … something that you do that you feel strongly about or when you do it, it gives you so much satisfaction and happiness. |
| Candidate | : | Oh, ok. I think it's singing. I very love singing. It's my special passion because whenever I sing, I feel super happy. |

In this situation, both the interviewer and candidate employed communicative strategies that proved to be effective in obtaining information on the part of the interviewer and answering the question asked on the part of the candidate. The communication was successful due to the fact that the interviewer was able to paraphrase her questions based on the cue given by the candidate seeking clarification.

In sum, the effective use of coping strategies as demonstrated in the excerpt above is imperative for communicative competence in all contexts and distinguishes highly competent communicators from those who are less so. Strategic competence is thus an essential component in a descriptive framework for communicative competence.

## 2.3    Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis

Pragmatics and discourse analysis are essentially approaches to studying language's relation to the contextual background features. Both deal with the study of (i) context, (ii) text and (iii) function (Cutting, 2002). The two approaches focus on the meaning of words in interaction and how interactors communicate more information than the words they use.

Secondly, pragmatics and discourse analysis are similar in the sense that they both look at discourse, or the use of language, concentrating on how stretches of language become meaningful and unified for their users (Cook, 1989). Specifically, discourse analysis pays attention to **coherence**; in which, it focuses on the quality of being 'meaningful and unified', whereas, pragmatics is primarily concern with **relevance**. In as such, both approaches are essentially complementary of one and the other in analyzing communication and speech patterns. Another common feature of the two approaches is their concern for **function**. Function is taken to mean the speaker's short-term purposes in speaking and long-term goals in interacting verbally (Cutting, 2002).

Discourse analysis, however, differs from pragmatics. It analyzes the overall framework of exchanges and conversation structure and also how one speaker's speech can influence the next speaker's response. Any attempts thus far to analyze the conversation structure have always been done through the use of **conversation analysis.** Conversation analysis has often been the approach adopted to examine conversation structure which is inherently related to aspects of 'social life' (Have 1999). CA, however, does not take into account pragmatic or sociolinguistic aspects of interaction, the background context of why and how

people say what they say, the components of situation, and the features of the social world and social identity such as occupation and gender of participants (Fairclough 1989).

Pragmatics, on the other hand gives importance to the social principles of discourse. It specifically deals with social maxims of being relevant, precise, clear and sincere. It takes a socio-cultural perspective on language usage, examining the way that the principles of social behaviour are expressed is determined by the social distance between speakers. Quite evidently, it is clear that one approach is primarily concerned with structures of discourse while the other, the social aspects of interaction. It is essential, however, for the purpose of this study that an approach that takes into account both aspects of interaction be employed to better understand the factors involved in female interview performance situation; whether female interviewees are indeed under performing or that they are subject to gender bias.

### 2.3.1   Interactional Sociolinguistics

This approach takes into account the pragmatic and sociolinguistics aspects of interaction and places great importance on the way language is situated in particular circumstances in social life. The main goal of interactional sociolinguistics is not to describe the structure of discourse as done with conversation analysis. It is to place focus on the communicative performance of female interview candidates and whether they are subject to elements of gender bias. However, both approaches are coming together now with analysts looking at the relationship between structure and social interaction, within the larger schemes of human conduct and the organization of social life (Ochs, Schegloff and Thompson 1996).

Leech (1997) proposes the act complementarism that any account of meaning in language must (a) be faithful to the facts as we observe them, and (b) must be as simple and generalizable as possible. These could not be met if we approach meaning entirely from a pragmatic point of view, or entirely from a semantic point of view. Consequently, both approaches that stem from the school of discourse analysis and pragmatics will be used in analyzing the data collected for this study.

## 2.3.2   The Cooperative Principle

It is a well known fact that verbal exchanges, be it interviews, conversations or service encounters, tend to run more smoothly and successfully when the participants follow certain social conventions (Searle 1969). The study of pragmatics would not have been complete with the exclusion of H.P. Grice's Cooperative Principle (1975) as it is one of the requirements to account for pragmatic interpretations; the other being the Politeness Principle. According to Leech (1997), we need the CP to help to account for the relation between sense (meaning as semantically determined) and force (meaning as pragmatically determined). Under this principle, four categories of maxims are distinguished. To understand the application of these maxims better, extracts from transcripts taken from an employment interview conducted by the researcher in her pilot study, is provided to serve as examples.

**Maxim of Quantity**

This first maxim of the cooperative principle states that speakers should be as informative as is required. They should neither give too little or too much information. This is because people who give too little information risk their hearer not being able to understand their intended message for the simple reason that they are not explicit enough; those who give more information than necessary run the risk of boring their hearers. Extracts below demonstrate how the maxim of quantity is observed in the conversation.

**Sample 1**

Interviewer 1  :  Was it difficult to get a parking space?

Candidate  :  It was okay, not too bad.

Interviewer 1  :  Are you nervous?

Candidate  :  (smile) Yes, a little bit.

As seen in the example above, the interviewer asks questions and the candidate gives answers that give just the right amount of information, and which are relevant to the question. The candidate, thus said to be following the conversational maxim of quantity (Grice 1975). Contrarily, the two examples below demonstrate how candidates in a job interview fail to observe this maxim by providing too much (sample 2) and too little information to the interviewers.

**Sample 2**

Interviewer 2  :  Can you fill this form for us immediately after the interview?

Candidate B  :  Yes, sure. I can just fill it up after this. No problem because I don't have to go anywhere

afterwards … just need to mail some stuff at the
post office. Sure, sure.

**Sample 3**

Interviewer 3  :  You represented your school in sports. In what
way has that helped you define your character?

Candidate C    : A lot.

**Maxim of Quality**

The second maxim is that of quality. It states that speakers are expected to be sincere in their speech. They are assumed not to be saying what they believe is false or anything for which they lack evidence. The example below is able to illustrate how maxim of quality is observed.

**Sample 1**

Interviewer    :        We'll be in touch with you shortly.

Candidate      :        Ok, will that be within this month?

Interviewer    :        Well, **if everything goes well,** you should hear from
us next month.

Most hearers assume that the speaker is telling the truth. In this example, the interviewer's expression of 'if everything goes well' protects him from the accusations of lying by impressing upon the fact that the candidate will be getting the result of the interview providing that nothing should go wrong in between the period of speech and the intended time in future. As confident as the interviewer may sound of the intended time of response,

he did make it clear that there is also an element of uncertainty. Thus, the interviewer is said to abide the maxim of quality.

**Maxim of Relation**

This maxim states that speakers are assumed to be saying something that is relevant to what has been said before. In certain cases, the speaker indicates how their comment has relevance to the conversation by using expression as seen in the example below.

> **Sample 1**
>
> Interviewer    :    Why are you interested in this job?
>
> Candidate    :    I see it as something that is challenging and **as I mentioned earlier**, I am the kind of person who likes to meet people.

**Maxim of Manner**

This maxim states that speakers should be brief and orderly in their speech and at all times avoid obscurity and ambiguity. According to Grice (1975) hearers assume that speakers observe the cooperative principle and that it is the knowledge of the four maxims that allows hearers to draw inferences about the speakers' intentions and implied meaning. Examples from excerpts taken from the researcher's pilot study above clearly shows the parameters of which these maxims often work and are being fulfilled.

## 2.4   Gender Communication Differences

Gender often shows discrepancy with status, such that women and activities associated with women are considered less valuable and less prestigious than men and the activities associated with them. The role of the 'breadwinner' (often associated with men) is viewed as being higher in status than that of the 'homemaker (often associated with women) (Deaux&Lafrance, 1998). Right from the beginning of time, perhaps, the distinctions between men and women were made obvious by societies and communities in general. With the emergence of language these distinctions were discovered to be much more profound.

West and Zimmerman (1985) point out that empirical study of actual speech discover only two areas of sex differences. The first is in phonetics: where women were found to employ the standard or correct pronunciation more than men in a variety of different languages. The second area is in the nonsegmental: where women demonstrate more pitch variability and more variable intonation than men. Findings such as these would, inadvertently, point out that women should be in a position to impress dominance in an intergender communication due to the simple reason that they are louder and much more eloquent. Furthermore the common cultural stereotype describes women as being talkative, always gossiping and always wanting to express their feelings. However, Holmes (1994) claims that there is extensive evidence that in a range of contexts, particularly in semi-formal and formal settings and in discussing a variety of topics, men were found to retain conversational control by talking longer and taking more turns.

Results in twenty four studies relating to formal task activities and interactions, James and Drakich (1993:289) found that thirteen (54.1%) studies to be in favour of men in which men were found to hold the floor longer than women. Only one (4.2%) study found women to talk more than men in a formal setting. Therefore, they concluded that in general men talked more than women in formal contexts. Generally, the two main approaches in the study of gender differences are 'differences' and 'dominance'.

### 2.4.1 The Dominance Approach

This approach stresses the hierarchical nature of gender relations as the primary factor that causes sex differences where women and men are described in terms of subordination and dominance (Coates 2004). It is through the works of Robin Lakoff (2004), that words like 'subordinate', 'weak', 'inferior', and 'deficit model' were and to a certain extend are still widely used today in association to women's speech. Lakoff's essay 'Language and Woman's Place' was one of the earliest publications in this field. It was later subjected to intense critics by researchers as Lakoff's essay relies on introspection and casual observation alone and not based on empirical findings.

Lakoff's claims, however, sparked a great deal of interest in this field due to its common-sense appeal and because they appeared to be rather specific and easy to investigate. Some of the linguistic features that, according to Lakoff, are typical of women's speech are the use **lexical hedges** ("you know…", "well…", "you see…"), **tag questions** ("It's quite simple, isn't it?"), hypercorrect grammar, **superpolite forms**, and **intensifiers** ("so", "just"). Lakoff strongest claim is to state that these linguistic features are indications of uncertainty and lack of confidence, reflecting women's subordinate status in society.

The dominance approach is further strengthened by Swann's (1996) work on analysis of talk in the classroom to investigate how dominance is achieved in such setting. Her findings confirm that boys do succeed in dominating classroom talk by various means. This act of dominance, according to Swann, is achieved not only by means of the boys' own initiation but also through the behaviour of the girls and and of the teacher. In other words, she sees girls and teachers as colluding in boy's dominance.

In another study carried out by Woods (1996) on dominance at the workplace, it was discovered that in mixed group interactions that she recorded, male speakers interrupted more, and were interrupted less than female speakers; male speakers held significantly longer turns and received far more minimal responses (mhm, yeah, etc.). According to Woods, while occupational status did have a certain influence on floor-holding, it was men who dominated, whether they were boss or subordinate and that being a boss did not lead to women holding the floor more than men.

In studies mentioned above, the use of a dominance model is clearly necessary to explicate the various findings. Coates (2004), nonetheless, caution that the dominance approach is not always the most appropriate to be used singularly and that a more sophisticated view of social behaviour and social structure should be taken through the use of the difference approach.

## 2.4.2 The Difference Approach

The difference approach tries to eliminate the andocentric viewpoint that men's language is deemed 'strong' and women's language 'weak'. This subculture approach attempts to

investigate sex differences in communicative competence, and in particular women's language, from a positive standpoint. According to Maltz and Borker (1982), differences in men's and women's speech features are not a reflection of power imbalance between the two but rather, that women and men have been internalized different norms for conversational interaction. They characterize women's conversational style as 'affliative' and is very much based on the principle of cooperativeness. They further affirm that women use conversation to obtain information, gain rapport and connect with others. Men's conversational style, on the other hand, is said to be 'adversarial' and is driven by competitiveness. According to Coates and Cameron (1988), the difference approach sees women as simply different from men whilst the dominance approach views women as a minority group which is oppressed and marginalized.

Deborah Tannen's works (1990, 1991) clearly illustrate the 'difference' theory. According to this theory, as children often play in a single-sex group and later have same-sex friendship in adult life, the creation of subcultures or subcultural norm between men and women is inevitable. As such, women and men naturally develop different styles of talking. Tannen (1990) further claims that men have been found to be more comfortable speaking in larger groups made up of people they know less as opposed to women who generally prefer establishing connections and negotiating relationships in a more private setting. These situations are also more popularly known as 'report' talk and 'rapport' talk.

Nonetheless, feminist researchers claim that the difference approach tends to 'side-step power issues' in language and gender and that this two-culture (of men's and women's) perspective is distorted and oversimplified (Yerian 1977). Coates and Cameron (1988), however, claim that the women's and men's subcultures are not divorced from prevailing

power structures and that it cannot be coincidental that men's style is aggressive and competitive while women's style is supportive and co-operative. As Cameron, McAlinden and O'Leary ( 1996) ) point out, in treating men and women conversational style as being different, there is also a need to analyze the dimension of dominance as women's and men's subcultures are not completely divorced from prevailing power structures.

A summary of previous works on both the dominance and the difference approach can be seen in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: A Summary on the Difference and Dominance Approach in Analyzing Women's and Men's Conversational Style**

| Difference Approach | Dominance Approach |
|---|---|
| • Women and men belong to different sub-culture (Coates & Cameron,1988)<br><br>• Men and women develop different norms of communicative competence within their own single sex peer groups since childhood.(Sheldon, 1990)<br><br>• Spontaneous speech from boys and girls showed systematic differences because members of each sex learn to be proficient in different language skills and to do different things with words. (Goodwin,1980)<br><br>• Women's features and men's features in speech do not reflect a power of imbalance but that men and women have identified different norms for conversational interaction due to the different sense of social relations and responsibilities. (Maltz&Borker, 1982) | • Linguistic differences in women's and men's communicative competence are a reflection of men's dominance and women's subordination. (Coates & Cameron, 1998).<br><br>• Men's talk often taken to be more prestigious, convey power and authority whereas women's often deemed as inferior, weak, immature and is often trivial. (Lakoff, 1975)<br><br>• Men's dominance in conversation parallels their dominance in society. (West & Zimmerman, 1977)<br><br>• Norms of appropriate behaviour for men and women serve to give more power to men while keeping it away from women. (Fishman, 1978) |

| | |
|---|---|
| • Men and women developed different styles of speech due to the establishment of the subculture or subcultural norms that manifested from social norms that boys and girls have to behave and speak differently. (Tannen, 1990) | |

This study, nonetheless, does not look at both approaches as being mutually exclusive but takes into account the underlying principles of both as an interpretive framework upon which to work on. It is, however, slightly more inclined towards the principles of the difference approach in determining gender communicative differences in an employment interview. This is due to a the popular claim that the most significant difference between male and female communicative competence is that men's conversational style is based on **competitiveness,** whereas women's is based on **cooperativeness** (Coates 2004).

According to Coates, when women talk, their chief aim is the maintenance of social relationships; this has priority over the exchange of information. Although Coates works have been largely concerned with White, middle-class English women, there is also a strong indication that similar generalization can be made for women in Malaysia based on the various studies on gender communication style that formed a strong platform form which this study is currently undertaken.

To analyze how widespread is the cooperativeness as a communicative norm among female speakers, two studies on women's conversation style in Malaysia have been singled out to ascertain the hypothesis that cooperativeness may not be restricted to one particular group

of women. Jariah Mohd. Jan (2000) carried out a study on power and solidarity in Malaysian talk show, confirms that there is a strong indication that women in Malaysia are also more inclined toward establishing co-operative talk that signify feminine solidarity and that the male subject in her research demonstrated a distinct style of interaction based on power and competitiveness.

**2.4.3 Politeness**

The phenomenon of politeness is certainly difficult to define due to its multiple-interpretive natures. What is considered polite behaviour varies from one culture to another. According to Holmes (1995), "women are more orientated to affective, interpersonal meanings than men. Women agree with others, compliment others, and apologise more often than men, demonstrating sensitivity to the feelings of other people, and using these speech acts as tokens of solidarity."

Ng's (1999) research on findings associated with politeness in women's speech include the tendency of women not to swear as much as men (Jespersen, 1933); women use less slang (Flexner, 1960); women prefer to use correct speech forms and more prestigious pronunciation (Shuy et. al, 1967; Fasold, 1986; Trudgill, 1972; Labov, 1972); women use more tag questions, hesitations, superpolite terms and empty adjectives and women tend to adhere to formalities and polite social forms in their speech (Lakoff, 1975); women talk and interrupt less (Hirshman, 1973; Zimmerman and West, 1975).

Ng (1999) reveals that behaving politely in public is quintessential of a lady's conduct in public. The study which was conducted over the span of thirty episodes of a local talk show points out the female compere's constant display of polite behaviour when interviewing her guests. According to Ng, "evidence of politeness in the female compere lies in her unrefuted generous use of back channels. These back channel cues exhibit positive politeness and are supportive moves that function as continuers which give the speaker (the guest) the mandate to continue speaking." This study indeed affirms various other findings in western culture as those established by other researchers such as Troemel-Ploetz's (1992) analysis of German television discussions and Franken's (1983) study of the distribution of talk in three television interviews.

Generally, in Malaysia, politeness is taken to be one of the essential elements that recruiting teams look for in an employment interview. In an informal interview with twelve recruiting personnel form multinational hiring companies, all (100%) of these personnel opine that polite behaviour and speech demonstrated by candidates often take them a long way in the interview as they mark a certain degree of pleasantness and grace, archetypical of a first-rated staff.

Holmes (1991) suggests that women interviewee were more often found to be cooperative and polite, contributing substantially more talk overall than the men. She further reiterates her claim through her findings on data collected on interviewee talk with New Zealand women and men for the Wellington Social Dialect Survey in 1993 where the women being interviewed for the survey were found to be more cooperative and polite. The men, on the other hand, seemed determined to answer every question as briefly as possible, and in many cases monosyllabically. Unlike an employment interview, this interview was conducted to

illicit responses from the general public on a survey conducted. This explains the men's curt responses to questions asked, as they do not feel the need to achieve anything important to them at the end of the interview.

### 2.4.4   Assertiveness

Barone and Switzer (1995) equate deployment of assertive language with self-confidence. Having the 'sought after' qualities in a candidate and the ability to verbalize them puts a candidate in a good stance when faced with situations that warrant him/her to do so as in an employment interview. However, King (1993) cautions female candidates against "overdoing" it. This is due to Brovermann et.al. (1970) claims that assertiveness in women is perceived negatively (impolite) whilst, assertiveness in men is acceptable as an expression of men's masculinity. In other words, when women tries to be assertive, she is perceived as being aggressive whilst assertion in men is seen as a reflection of his self-confidence.

> "Some women, aware of the gender discrimination they face and determined not to be taken lightly, go into interviews with guns blazing. They attempt to wow the intervieweer with bold strong language and assertive claims. Unfortunately, this usually backfires. Our society still holds very firm ideas about what language and attitudes are proper for a woman, and if you break those conventions, you will be perceived as overly aggressive. Unfair but true".
>
> (King 1993: 95)

There is indeed a very fine line between assertive and overly aggressive. Hargie (1986) in dispelling the misconception that assertiveness is forceful or aggressive defines it as, "the individual's right to emphasize his or her desires while simultaneously respecting the rights of the other people involved."

Women need to work a little harder in determining the degree of assertiveness that needs to come into play in an employment interview. Hence, Rakos' (1986) advice "the best caveat regarding the 'appropriateness of assertion' for women is to maintain an awareness of the situation-specific learned social skill needed to enhance one's adaptation to the environment." Perhaps a little consolation is found in Furnham's (1979) assertion that the lack of assertiveness is not necessarily a sign of inadequacy or weakness.

## 2.5  Employment Interviews

Interviews play a powerful role in contemporary communication. Although the study of human communication is thousand of years old, the specific study of communication in interpersonal and business settings is a relatively new phenomenon (Redding 1992). The study of interviews is even more recent, with the earliest one appearing in 1960s (Barone& Switzer 1995).

An interview is a communication interaction between two or more parties, at least one of whom has a goal, that uses questions and answers to exchange information and influence one another (Barone& Switzer 1995). Stewart and Cash (1994) give a holistic definition in which they state that interviewing is a process of dyadic, relational communication, with a predetermined and serious purpose designed to interchange behaviour and involving the asking and answering of questions.

### 2.5.1 Dyadic Communication

According to Stewart and Cash (2002), the word dyadic denotes that the interview is a person-to-person interaction between two parties or units. There can perhaps be more than two people involved in the interview, but never more than two parties – an interviewer party and interviewee party.

### 2.5.2 Relational Communication

The word relational suggests an interpersonal connection between the interview parties. This may involve a relationship fostered based on mutual interactions and interest in the outcomes. On the other hand, the dyadic nature interview may lead to polarization of the parties into "me vs. you" or "we vs. they" and require the principles of negotiation or persuasion.

### 2.5.3 Predetermined and Serious Purpose

Stewart and Cash (2002) state that, at least one of the two parties comes to an interview with a goal and has planned the interview to focus on specific subject matter. This they say distinguishes the interview from any other social conversation, although polite conversation, chit chat or digressions is also essential in interviews.

### 2.5.4 Asking and Answering Questions

The process of asking and answering questions is indeed the essence of an interview. Questions are the tools interviewers and interviewees use to obtain information, check the accuracy of messages sent and received, and verify impressions and assumptions (Stewart & Cash 2002).

### 2.5.5 Interview Structure

Interviews are generally divided into three basic sections: the opening, body, and conclusion. Although each segment differ in the amount of time they require, each serves important functions for the interview.

### (a) Interview Opening

Interview opening is critically important to the overall success of the interview because it sets the tone for the entire interview (Barone& Switzer 1995).This is due to the notion that what happens in the first several minutes of an interview shapes the impressions that the two parties have of one another and of the interview itself. Schlenker's (1980) overview of research about how people manage their impressions shows that individuals often choose to exhibit certain behaviours in order to impress others.

Much research has been carried out in the field of social science to determine the importance of the opening of an interview. A phenomenon called *primacy effect* has been

established to help explain the significance of an interview opening and the magnitude of its effect on a candidate in an interview. The *primacy effect* states that information received and developed early in a relationship has a more powerful impact on the impressions formed by the participants as opposed to that received later. Jones and Goethels (1972) note that *primacy effects* have a consistently strong influence on impression formation and that impressions formed on the basis of early behaviours are powerful, both positively and negatively, in determining the eventual outcome of the interview. In an employment interview, interviewers would be able to form their own impression on the candidates based on their behaviour and actions which include greetings, nod, smile, hand shake, and grooming. According to Rosliza (2005), interviewers in Malaysia are generally very much concerned with the simple act of greetings and acknowledgement expressed by interview candidates as soon as they walk into the interview room and that, it is almost always, a candidate who are able to handle an interview opening skillfully and effectively would be the one to be much favoured by the interviewers.

An interview opening serves three basic functions: exchange of mutual introductions, establish relationship, and provide preview of what to expect next in the interview (Barone& Switzer 1995). An opening does not have to be long to accomplish its purposes and that once completed, the interviewer moves to the actual questioning phase of the interview, known as the *body* of the interview.

**(b) Body of the Interview**

The body if the interview, as with the body of speech, is the core of the interview. It is in the body of the interview that both parties work to achieve their basic goals (Stewart & Cash 1994). As a result, this is the part of the interview that takes the most time. In essence, the body is where the essential work of the interview takes into play.

Generally, questions put forward by the interviewer or panel of interviewers are very much guided by the degree of control that the interviewer/s wish to exercise in a form of an interview guide. The specificity and completeness of the interview guide will usually be determined in part by the interviewers' goals. The three main form of interview guides are highly scheduled standardized, moderately scheduled and non scheduled.

In Malaysia, the most common form of interview guide being practiced by hiring companies is the moderately scheduled interview. A moderately scheduled interview guide includes a list of all major questions to be covered and some possible follow-up questions. Major questions would be those associated with candidates' personal and scholastic background whilst the follow-up questions are those usually related to candidates' ambitions and aspirations.

It is during this crucial part of the interview that a candidate's communicative competence is put to the test. Candidates are not only assessed on their 'hard skills' but also on their other finer attributes or 'soft skills' which will be further discussed in another section: Criteria Assessed in Job Interviews.

**(c) Interview Closing**

The function of an interview closing is to conclude the interview and bring it to a close. In employment interviews, the interviewer takes the lead in providing the cue to mark the end of the session. Candidates can also utilize this final stage to further impress upon the interviewer/s their keen interest for employment with the company. Expression of thanks from both interviewers and candidates will conclude the interview. Although much has already been done at the crucial part of the interview, a clear, sincere 'thank you' and a good, firm handshake from a candidate would set him apart from the other candidates.

**2.6 Criteria Assessed in Job Interviews**

Organizations use interviews mainly to select new employees and determine where they best fit into organizations. The process of selecting the best candidate for the hiring company can be a tedious endeavor. This is due to the intricacies of the whole process when dealing with human attributes that can easily be subjected to prejudice, bias and subjectivity. According to Parkinson (1997), a good interviewer will assess a candidate against the requirements for the job which entails the evaluation of the candidate's particular skills, abilities, experiences and knowledge.

Parkinson (1997) provides a list of criteria often looked for by interviewers as seen below. The list is in order of importance:

- Personality
- Experience
- Qualifications
- Background

- Enthusiasm
- Education

Personality is seen here as the utmost preferred quality in candidates that employers look for during job interviews. Experience is considered the second most sought after prerequisite. Nonetheless, in the case of fresh graduates, experience would probably be candidates' skills acquired during apprenticeship or internship.

## 2.6.1 'Hard Skills'

Hard skill can be taken to mean one of several different things, all related to specialized skill, knowledge or experience required for a certain industry, a profession or a job function. Generally, 'hard skill' refers to the technical skill required for certain professions. JAVA or HTML to a web designer or advanced spreadsheet skills to a financial analyst are two such examples.

According to Parkinson (1997), specialized knowledge and training in a particular professional field are also considered as 'hard skills'. For example, a CPA needs to know all the tax codes; a bankruptcy attorney needs to be familiar with the bankruptcy laws and the filing process; and a mechanical engineer need to have all the trainings required for a bachelor's or a master's degree in mechanical engineering.

Work experiences too falls under the umbrella of 'hard skills'. A marketing manager with years of experience working in a big consumer product company, a business consultant building broad business perspective and deep industry knowledge in the insurance industry,

and a call center manager managing a site with 2,000 seats, are all considered having specialized hard skills in their respective fields.

## 2.6.2 'Soft Skills'

'Soft skills' are general skills that are of great essence regardless what job, level, profession or industry a person is in. The most essential 'soft skill' regarded with the highest importance is communication skill (King 1993). This include "listening attentively, asking the right questions, writing clear and convincing presentations, speaking in front of a large audience, catering your presentation style for different audience, and selling your ideas to senior management" (King 1993).

Indeed, soft skills, no matter what they are, have everything to do with communicating and language competence is the key that holds all the other integrative elements of 'soft skills' together. There is no way, for example, an interview candidate is going to be able to show that he/she is friendly, tactful, thoughtful and diplomatic without the appropriate and effective language use.

## 2.7 Summary

This chapter puts into focus major studies and researches carried out in the field of language and gender. The aim is to provide solid scaffolding upon which this case study is built on. Theoretical framework for this study is established through works done in the area of gendered communication differences as the essence and pragmatics as well as discourse analysis as its analytical tools.

# CHAPTER 3

## METHODOLOGY

### 3.0    Intoduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework undertaken to investigate the linguistic featuresand communication patternsof candidates in a series of job interviews conducted by Company A.  The series of interviews began with several candidates shortlisted by the company and the final stage of the interviews was later narrowed down to four candidates; two males and two females. A mixed methods design that combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect and analyse data for this study is employed.

### 3.1    Theoretical Framework

This study employs a mixed methods design that combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches.Triangulation of methods was used in the collection of data for this study. According to Patton (2001), triangulation or the combination of methodologies is an ideal way to strengthen a research design as different methods are, in most times, able to reveal different information and facets of the study.

A mixed-method evaluation design was employed for this particular case study as it serves to strengthen the validity of its findings.   Green et al. (1989) highlighted five major purposes that might enhance the evaluation taking place, as follows:

- **Triangulation**

"Triangulation tests the consistency of findings obtained through different instruments". In this case study, observations, audio-recording, interviews and field notes serve as the instruments used to accumulate data to be analyzed. As such, triangulation in these forms would hopefully increase chances of better control of the variables and multiple causes that may be influencing the results in this case study.

- **Complementarities**

"Complementarities clarify and illustrate results from one method with the use of another method". In this case study, observations made by researcher throughout the job interviews carried out on the candidates would add significant information to the discourses that are at play.

- **Development**

"Development results from one method shape subsequent methods or steps in the research process".

- **Initiation**

"Initiation stimulates new research questions or challenges results obtained through one method". In relevance to this case study, in-depth interviews to be carried out with interview panellists will provide new insights on communication styles that worksfavourably for the candidates.

- **Expansion**

"Expansion provides richness and detail to the study exploring specific features of each method". As with this case study, the integration of methods will expand the

study and hopefully enlighten the more general debate on gendered communication differences and the preferred communication styles in an interview.

In other words, the mixed methods employed as a research strategy by means of integrating different methods is hoped to produce better results in terms of quality and validity.

Having established the significance of utilizing combined methodologies in the data collection process, methods that involved audio-recording, observations, filed notes, and interviews were employed for this case study.

## 3.1.2 Qualitative Approach

Qualitative methods will assist in the collection and analysis of the language used during the series of job interviews. A case study of job interviews conducted by a company, assigned as Company A in this study, will be recorded and field notes will be taken by the researcher. This is in line with Lofland's (1971) assertion that qualitative methodologist must aim at capturing what actually takes place and what people actually say and essentially understands that qualitative inquiry is fundamentally people-oriented in nature.

The researcher will be involved from the beginning of the interview process as an insider, and as a participatory observer she will be able to take a close look at the selection process right up to the final selection stage. Interviews with the panellists will be conducted prior to and after each session of job interviews to obtain their feedback on the assessment made of each candidate. This was to get instant reactions and a higher degree of spontaneity on the part of the interviewers while "situations and thoughts are still fresh" (McClure, 1989).

Furthermore, the period just after an interview or observation is critical to the rigor and validity of qualitative inquiry. As put by Creswell (1994) "This is a time for guaranteeing the quality of data (Creswell, 1994).

Recordings of the interviews will be transcribed to enable a detailed analysis of gender communication and to compare any differences in the linguistic and the communication styles of the final shortlisted candidates. Feedback from panellists will be used to further analyse the preferred soft skills and strategies used during the series of job interviews. Using the principles of discourse analysis and Grice's Maxims (1975), data analysis will look into social maxims of language and linguistic devices employed by candidates in the interviews.
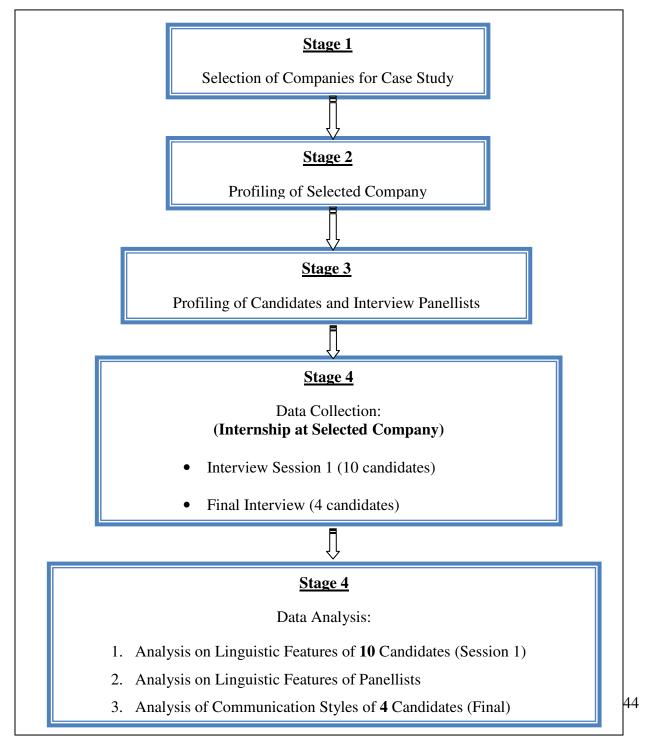
### 3.1.1 Quantitative Approach

This study aims to compare candidates' performance during job interview especially in terms of turn taking to reflect floor apportionment of each candidate and to count the frequency of the different types of linguistic features to denote differences, if any, in gender communication. This will be observed using a two-pronged strategy that allows the analysis of the relationship between the frequency counts of various linguistic features used by the candidates and their overall performance during the interview. As the study intends to examine "successful" strategies employed by candidates, quantifying the frequency counts will be able to identify the types of linguistic features that receive positive remarks by the panellists. Findings will be presented in the form of frequency tables.

**3.2    Research Design**

The research design of this case study was formulated based on the need to analyselanguage features used by two groups of subjects,  namely, the candidates and panellists in a series of job interviews. The figure below illustrates the research design of this case study:

**Figure 3.1:    Research Design of the Present Study**

### 3.3 Data Collection

A set of combined methodologies in the data collection process involving selection of companies for the case study, profiling on the candidates as well as panellists, audio-recording, observations, filed notes, and interviews were employed for this case study.

### 3.3.1 Selection of Companies for Case Study

In this study, three private companies have agreed to take part in the research conducted. At the initial stage, the researcher approached over thirty five big 'players' in the job market. These companies were identified as they were in the process of recruitment. Based on advertisements posted by these companies in the local dailies, the researcher narrowed down the choices based on the positions being advertised.

As this study essentially focuses on communication styles and linguistic features used by candidates in job interviews, the type of positions being advertised by these companies is a crucial determinant factor. As such, selection was based oncompanies that advertise for positions in relation to sales, marketing, human resources, corporate communications and public relations are most inclined to look for individuals with excellent communication skills. This would offer the researcher wider perspectives in analyzing the discourse patternsthat take place during the interviews.

Another important determining factor that hadinfluence the selection of companies to be approached is the companies' interest in hiring fresh graduates. Essentially, these are the

two elements that the researcher would like to focus on in identifying the companies to be invited to participate in this case study. At the beginning of the selection process for a suitable company eighteen (18) companies were short-listed and approached by the researcher. Ten (10) companies were not able to participate due to strict company policies while others did not provide any form of response at all. Three of these companies, however, had responded positively.

A meeting with the representative of the three agreeable companies was scheduled to discuss details of the study; also the terms and conditions that the companies might wish to impose on the part of the researcher. The table below providesa description of the three companies,henceforth referred to as companies A, B, and C for the purpose of this study,and the terms and conditions imposed by them on the researcher.

Details of the three companies are provided in Table 3.1 illustrates the decisive factors of which the researcher had to take into consideration when selecting the most suitable site and setting for the case study. It was certainly the researcher's intent to use data collected from all three companies for the purpose of this study. Regrettably, only one company, Company A, was able to fulfill the criteria set by the researcher to carry out her investigation.

**Table 3.1: Companies' Profile and Terms and Conditions Imposed for Data Collection Procedures**

| Companies | Company's Profile | Terms & Conditions |
|---|---|---|
| **Company A** | • A consulting firm<br><br>• Services provided include management consultancy, recruitment consultancy and training, business development and strategic planning consultancy etc.<br><br>• Organizational chart : Director (1), Managing Director (1) Managers (3), Senior Consultants (6), Consultants (5) and support staffs (4)<br><br>• Plans to conduct interviews for the post of management trainee (1 position) and recruitment consultant (1 position) | • No video-recording of interviews are allowed.<br><br>• Audio-recording of interviews is permitted.<br><br>• Researcher is only allowed to observe the interviews and participation on the part of the researcher is not encouraged.<br><br>• Interviews and further discussions of the job interviews with panellist are allowed.<br><br>• Researcher is required to fulfill an attachment period with the company during which she is required to assist the company's HR personnel in conducting the whole process of recruitment from advertising right to the interviews. In return, she is given the privilege to record and report every minute details deem important for the study.<br><br>• A written report of the case study (or a copy of researcher's thesis) must be submitted to the company for reference. |
| **Company B** | • A legal firm.<br><br>• Services include consultancy in banking and finance<br><br>• Organisational chart : Chairman (1), Managing Partner (1), Partners (18), Consultants (6) and support staffs (11) | • Audio recordings of interviews conducted by the company are allowed. However, a copy of the recordings must be submitted to the company for approval and consent<br><br>• Interviews with the panel of interviewers are permitted |

| | | • Participation during the interviews on the part of the researcher is not allowed. |
|---|---|---|
| **Company C** | • A digital branding and marketing consultancy firm<br><br>• Services include training and coaching on new age marketing strategies, marketing and branding events and digital documentation<br><br>• Organisational chart : Managing Director (1), Sr. Managers (2), Programmers (7), Designers & Marketing Personnels (12), technical staffs (6) and clerical staffs (5)<br><br>Plans to conduct interviews for the post of marketing consultants (3 positions) | • Recordings in any form be it video or audio is strictly prohibited.<br><br>• Researcher is only allowed to observe the interview and interviews with the panel of interview on their decisions on selection of candidates are not encouraged<br><br>• Transcriptions of interviews are not permitted to be published or printed for the viewing of the general public<br><br>• A copy of the report of the study must be submitted to the company subject to the company's approval and consent for publication |

Company B, in this case, was unable to inform the researcher of the specific time and date for its interviews. As time is of an essence, and after having had to go through several postponements of interviews by the company, the researcher had to make the crucial decision of eliminating company B from her choices of sites for this study.

Further to this, as observed in Table 3.1 the terms and conditions set by company C were quite inflexible. Getting a feedback from the panel of interviewers was deem as an important element in providing essential observation and comments made by the panel in selecting the best candidates for the company. As this crucial pursuit did not receive the much needed consent from the company, the researcher had no choice but to eliminate Company C's participation in this study upon failing to convince and persuade the

company to provide the researcher a certain degree of lenience to allow this study an ample room for empirical development. Interviewers' feedback would allow the researcher to probe into the humanistic perspectives in decision making during the interviews. This is in line with Lofland's (1971) assertion that qualitative methodologist must aim at capture real data that takes place at its original site as it should be fundamentally people-oriented in nature.

Henceforth, for the purpose of this studyonly company A was selected to provide the researcher with the site and setting for this research. Company A had also expressed a great interest on the study being carried out and even agreed to render any form of assistance that the researcher might need during the temporary attachment period. This has created an appeal and an added advantage for the researcher in ensuring the data collection can be carried successfully and effectively. What was more interesting was the request made for the researcher to undergo temporary attachment with the company as it is the company's policy to keep their recruitment procedures within and amongst hired members and staffs of the company which includes permanent and temporary staffs. This way, the researcher would technically be considered as part of the organization. No outside parties are allowed to take part at any part or stages of their recruitment processes.

### 3.3.1.1    Profile of Company A

Company A is a management consulting company, a private limited company registered with Register of Companies (ROC), Companies Commission of Malaysia. As specified in the company's profile kit, services provided by this company include management consulting (idea mining and development, concept articulation, feasibility market, business

start-up planning and implementation), technology consulting (ICT, infrastructure solution, business intelligence, etc.), project management (project planning, time management, financial management, project tracking, etc.) and recruitment consulting and training. It is a young and fast growing company that takes pride in having a different and unique approach in their nature of work as reflected in its motto *cogita differente* which means 'think different'. As such, according to its Managing Director, the company comprises of team players who are innovative, creative, highly-motivated, resourceful and that it is always on the lookout for fresh team members who display similar traits.

### 3.3.2   Profile of Interview Panellists

This section presents the profile of the two (2) panellists for the series of job interviews.

### *Panellist1*

The first panellist is the Managing Director of the company. He holds leadresponsibility for overall management of the group. He has an MBA (with distinction) and a BA (Hons) in Combined Studies with Accounting, both from De Monfort University, Leicester, United Kingdom. He has vast experience in managing finance of public companies and business development as well as exposure to international business.

At the time of the study,at age 41, Panellist 1 (coded as PM henceforth)is well respected by his fellow staff and colleagues, not only due to the position he holds in the office but also due to his personality that reflects a high degree of interpersonal skills and intellectual

capabilities. He has been directly involved in the company's recruitment process since the company was first established.

*Panellist2*

Panellist 2 (coded as PF henceforth) is a senior consultant who has been serving company A , since year 2000. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Accounting and Finance from Salford University, Manchester, England. She was formerly an Audit Executive with a renowned oil and gas company before embarking on a solo mission to be a free lance recruitment agent.

In 1999, she took up an offer from company A to provide consultancy in setting up the company's corporate communications and human resource (training) unit. Once the company was established, Interviewer 2 was offered a permanent job as its human resource director and is very much known to be the backbone of Company A in managing the administrative, financial, and human resource requirements of the company. As she is still actively and directly involved in the recruitment process of the company, she very much prefers to be addressed as the company's senior consultant.

Although a senior associate in the company, Panellist 2 is very well favoured by her fellow colleagues and much respected by her junior associates. She exhibits warm, vivacious, self-assured and determined qualities that make her a great asset to the company. It is also imperative to note that Panellist 2 has a very strong influence in most decision makings of the company.

Both panellists have been actively involved in providing training for young recruits of Company A. Although the earlier screening of the company's recruitment procedures are done by an appointed recruitment consulting agency, the final stage of the recruiting is always being undertaken by these two senior members of the company. Thus, the interview sessions are most often being arranged within these panellists' schedules to enable them to handle the interviews personally. This is done so in their mission to identify the best talents to work with the company.

Both panellists have had eight to ten years of experience in interviewing candidates not only at their present company but also in other establishments they were previously attached. Being in the Company A since its first inception, both interviewers know exactly what the company needed – young graduates, who are driven to excel, possess the ability to be an excellent team player, highly motivated with strong leadership potential and creative. These qualities are interpreted in a form of behavioural outcomes in the company's advertisement for new recruit.

### 3.3.3   Profile of the Candidates

The selection of subjects was done through an elimination process that determines the candidates' suitability for the post advertised by the company. This task was assigned to a renowned online recruitment agency that undertook the responsibility to upload digital advertisements for interested candidates to apply online. One hundred and twenty four (124) applicants wrote in to the company and after going through three elimination rounds, only twenty were shortlistedfor an interview with the company.  Amongst the shortlisted candidates called for interview, only ten showed up and were included in the final round of

selection.   . An overview of shortlisted candidates' general background is displayed in Table 3.2.

**Table 3.2:  Profile of Shortlisted Candidates for Interviews**

| Candidate | Age | Sex | Qualifications | University |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Candidate 1 | 26 | Female | Bach. Degree in Business Studies | Local |
| Candidate 2 | 25 | Female | Degree in Political Science | Local |
| Candidate 3 | 27 | Female | Degree in Psychology | Overseas |
| Candidate 4 | 25 | Male | Degree in Mechanical Engineering | Local |
| Candidate 5 | 25 | Female | Degree in IT | Local |
| Candidate 6 | 26 | Male | Degree in Finance and Marketing | Overseas |
| Candidate 7 | 24 | Male | Degree in IT | Local |
| Candidate 8 | 27 | Male | Degree in Mechanical Engineering | Local |
| Candidate 9 | 27 | Female | Degree in Civil Engineering | Local |
| Candidate 10 | 25 | Male | Advanced Diploma in Architecture | Local |

Table 3.2 shows that the ten fresh graduates involved in this study were from both local and overseas universities, with ages ranging between 23 – 27 years old.  Thus, a total of ten candidates were interviewed which comprises of five male candidates and five female candidates. These candidates are from a single ethnic group – Malay. This was indeed coincidental and was not deliberately done on the part of the company nor the recruitment agency. As interested candidates have access to the company's website, they may have developed an impression that it is a Malay oriented establishment based on the company's

organizational chart. This could possibly be the reason behind the lack of interest of other ethnic groups to join the company.

### 3.3.3.1 Screening Tests for Candidates

All interested candidates were put through a series of online tests to determine their proficiency level in the English language and personality profile. These tests were digital in nature and candidates or any other parties are not able to print a copy of these tests apart from completing them online. Results of these tests, however are indicated in the candidates' profile being forwarded to Company A.

The two tests mentioned are:

**(1)** **Proficiency Test (English)**

The proficiency test was conducted to evaluate candidates' proficiency in the target language. The test is divided into four parts; consisting of conversational, vocabulary, grammar and comprehension sections. Each section comprises of 10 questions with a total of 40 questions to be completed. Candidates were required to answer all sections. The candidates are then rated in accordance to the band below:

The candidates are then rated in accordance to the band below:

| Band | Marks |
|------|-------|
| A | 30 – 40 |
| B | 20 – 29 |
| C | 10 – 19 |
| D | 0 – 9 |

(Source: Recruitment Agency's Language Proficiency Band)

Essentially, candidates with band D of the proficiency test are eliminated at this stage of screening.

**(2)  Personality Test**

The purpose of the personality test conducted was to profile candidates' personal qualities and traits.  Candidates were evaluated based on the personality descriptors provided by the recruiting agency where candidates are categorized into four basic personality types: sanguine, choleric, melancholy, and phlegmatic. These categories denote different qualities and attributes of an individual as can be seen in the Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3:  Types of Personality AttributesSet by Recruitment Agency**

| SANGUINE | CHOLERIC |
|---|---|
| **Saguine's Emotions**<br>• Appealing personality<br>• Good sense of humour<br>• Enthusiastic & expressive<br>• Sincere at heart<br>• Always curious<br><br>**Saguine at Work**<br>• Makes friends easily<br>• Creative and colourful<br>• Proactive and volunteers for jobs<br>• Inspires others to join<br>• Charms others to work<br>• Do not hold grudges<br>• Likes spontaneous activities<br>• Optimistic | **Choleric's Emotions**<br>• Dynamic & active<br>• Strong-willed and decisive<br>• Unemotional<br>• Independent<br>• Compulsive need for change<br><br>**Choleric at Work**<br>• Born leader<br>• Not easily discouraged<br>• Goal oriented<br>• Organizes well<br>• Often sees the whole picture<br>• Often excels during emergencies<br>• Is usually right<br>• Stimulates activities and thrives on opposition<br>• Optimistic |

| MELANCHOLY | PHLEGMATIC |
|---|---|
| **Melancholy's Emotions**<br>• Thoughtful<br>• Serious and deep<br>• Sensitive to others<br>• Philosophical<br>• Artistic / musical<br>• Idealistic<br><br>**Melancholy at Work**<br>• Perfectionists<br>• Sets high standards<br>• A chartmaker and planner<br>• Faithful and devoted<br>• Content to stay in the background<br>• Very low profile<br>• Pessimistic | **Phlegmatic's Emotions**<br>• Low key<br>• Easy going and relaxed<br>• Patient<br>• Sympathetic and kind<br>• Keeps emotions hidden<br>• Does not get upset easily<br><br>**Phlegmatic at Work**<br>• Easy to get along with<br>• Compassionate and concern<br>• Good administrative ability<br>• Normally avoids conflicts<br>• Good under pressures<br>• Always finds the easy way<br>• Pessimistic |

(Source: Recruitment Agency's Personality Descriptor)

The personality descriptor provided by the Recruitment Agency after provide indications of candidates' characteristics that would give Company A a picture of personalities that they will be dealing with during the interviews. According to the panellists, although it provides them with a rough idea of a person's personality, it is not always being taken as the most precise indication. As such, this particular test is not considered by panellists as the key determinant in eliminating the candidates at this stage. Nonetheless, the panellists pointed out two types of personalities that they often find excellent to work with, namely, the Sanguine (frequently associated with individuals with excellent interpersonal skills) and Choleric (often associated with individuals who have great leadership potential).

### 3.3.4   Audio-recording

Audio-recording was essentially the main instrument used to gather data throughout the job interviews. According to Patton (2001), recording qualitative data increases the accuracy of data collection. For the purpose of this study, an MP3 recorder was used as it was not only reliable and unobtrusive but also acoustically impeccable. Nonetheless, subjects were informed of the company's intention to audio-tape the interviews.

Recordings in the MP3 allow the researcher to keep each recording in its individual files for easy reference. These recordings can also be downloaded into the windows system of the computer and can be easily assessed using the windows media player. This also allows the files to be replicated for safe keeping.   Discourse recorded would then be transcribed using the Gail Jafferson's Transcription Transcription Notation (1984). Jafferson's convention was used due to its simplicity and straightforwardness.

### 3.3.5   Field Notes

The researcher served almost a three month period of attachment (termed as the 'attachment' period) with Company A. This has provided an opportunity for the researcher to be directly involved multiple discussions and meetings pertaining to the recruitment process that consist of voluminous discourse activities. These were recorded in a form of field notes.  This was the best means of recording for data collection as the interviewers were reluctant to be audio-taped duringthese informal discussions.  Hence, notes were transcribed manually for future reference and use.

These field notes were also crucially pertinent to the study as they include details of the company's expectations of the candidates to be interviewed, the process of shortlisting the candidates and comments made by interviewers with regards to the candidates' performance during the job interview. These are certainly significant elements that are essential to this study as it provides much valuable insights. As stated by Lofland (1984), field notes are the most important determinant of later bringing off a qualitative analysis as they provide the observer's *raison d'etre*. This is further supported by Fetterman (1989) indicating that field notes allow researcher to capture what anthropologists call the "emic perspective" or rather, the insider's perspective on reality.

### 3.3.6    Observations

Direct observations on the part of the researcher were made possible as the researcher was allowed to sit in throughout the duration of the interviews. The researcher was, however, not encouraged to participate in the interviews as it was the company's longstanding policy that only experienced, management level personnel are required to conduct job interviews for executive posts. This was taken as an opportunity for the researcher to be a direct observer and become fully engaged in eliciting important nuances that may be present during the interactions between both parties (of the interviewers and interviewees) "that are apparent only to an observer who has not become fully immersed in those routines" (Patton, 2001).

For the purpose of this study, covert observation was also done to strengthen the validity and reliability of observational data concerned. Patton (2001) postulates that covert observations are more likely to capture what is really happening as compared to overt observations when the people in the setting are aware they are being studied.  It is essential

to note that the candidates were ethically informed of the company's intention to carry out a study on the interviews being conducted, thus the need for them to be audio-taped and observed by a third panellist (the researcher). However, as the researcher was technically a member of the establishment, the observation was able to be made in the most natural circumstances, hence, the covert observations.

### 3.3.6.1    Participatory Observation

The researcher spent a total of seventy five (75) days with the company as part of the requirement set forth by the company in granting permission for the researcher to carry out her data collection procedure. The attachment period was deemed necessary by the company to give the researcher a temporary employee status with the company due to its policy that prohibits any outside individuals to be involved in any of the company's dealings that surround issues of confidentiality or better known as the tag Private and Confidential (P&C).

As with other large corporate organizations, the company's recruitment policies and procedures are also labeled as P&C.  This requirement was indeed an excellent opportunity for the researcher as the invaluable experience gained provided some very profound insights on members of the company's expectations, ideas, inspirations and even judgments and also the company's working culture and orientation.

Throughout the course of this attachment period, the researcher went through a demanding phase of this study. The initial euphoria of excitement and jubilance of finding a breakthrough in this exploration was dampened by the researcher's "stick-out-like-a-sore-

thumb" syndrome not excluding the feelings of embarrassment, foolishness, frustrations and self-doubt that made her wonder if it was all worth the effort at all. These feelings of paranoia was, nonetheless, ameliorated by Patton's (2001) cautionary advice that "the initial period of fieldwork is, most often than not, an exhilarating time, a time of rapid new learning, when the senses are heightened by exposure to new stimuli, and a time of testing one's social, intellectual, emotional, and physical capabilities. It magnifies both the joys and pains of doing fieldwork".

This initial stage of uncertainties took place as the researcher was trying to adjust into the new setting and the other members of the organization were deciding how to behave towards her. Once the phase of establishing relationship and reciprocity was successfully generated, the researcher was able to focus on the objectives of this study.The researcher's temporary employment status with the company provided her with a multitude of knowledge and experience of what recruitment or hiring procedures entail.

Essentially, the researcher was required to assist a senior recruitment consultant with the company. Her job scope covers a range of multi-tasking duties which include typing letters to answering phone. However, the researcher's main job scope that ensured her direct involvement in the hiring process and procedures was the most essential. Some of her responsibilities include:

> 1. Attending meetings to discuss pertinent issues on recruitment procedures such as criteria for selection, listing of requirements,

detailing screening procedures, setting of interview schedules, drawing up interview guidelines etc.

2. Liaising with recruitment agencies on selection for suitable advertisements;

3. Assisting in the screening procedures;

4. Administering filing and recording of data in relation to the candidates' profiles.

### 3.3.7   Interviews

Apart from the actual interview between the panel of interviewers and the candidates, informal interviews with the panel of interviewers were also conducted after each session of interviews (four candidates per session) to get the interviewers' general feedback on the candidates performances.  These interviews were deem crucial for the researcher to gain insights on the panellists' views and outlook with regards to each of the candidates. It was the intention of the researcher to get feedbacks from the panel on each candidate after each individual interview while "situations and thoughts are still fresh" (McClure, 1989).
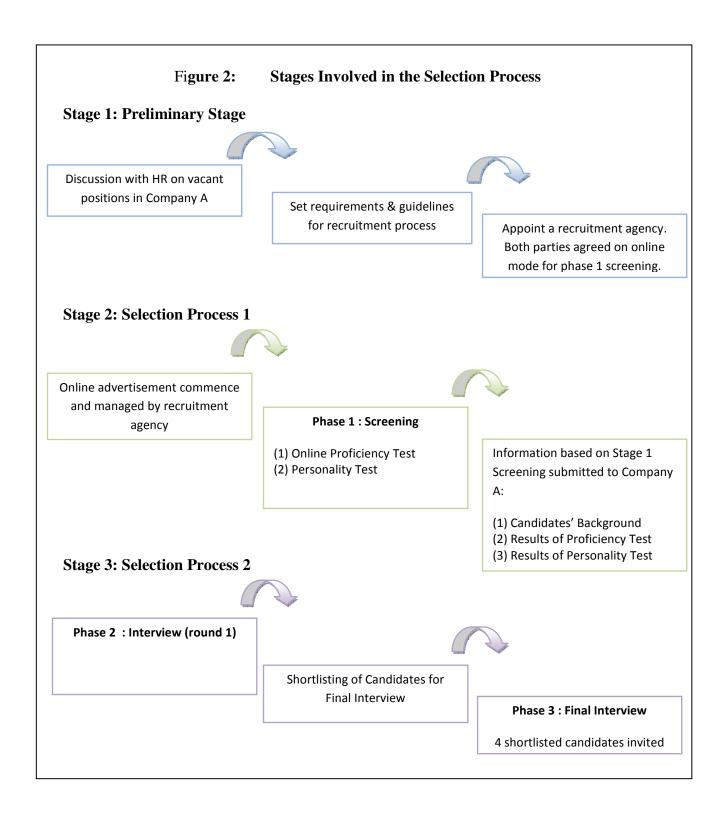
However, getting the panellists feedback after every individual interview was not considered possible due to time factor as the company wants the interviews to run without gaps. They, nonetheless, agreed that a review on each candidate can be done after each interview session (four candidates per session), as opposed to the usual practice of completing all interview sessions before the interviewers confer and decide on the successful candidates. The interview was conducted to obtain the interviewers' feedback based on the evaluation form that each interviewer had to fill for the candidates after each

interview. Basically, the interviewers would inform the researcher as to 'why' they grade

the candidates as they did (Refer to Appendix 3 for sample of evaluation form)

### 3.3.7.1.1    Stages Involved in the Selection Process

Advertising for the available posts is taken to be a very crucial process as the company

place great importance in drawing a high quality pool of applicants. Once the prerequisites

for the interview candidates were ascertained, these requirements were clearly stated in the

advertisement. The company has decided to use the services of a renowned recruiting

agency to organize the initial and pre-interview process.

The selection process involved isbasically done in three main stages as illustrated in Figure

3.1. As can be observed in Figure 3.1, preliminary discussions were held at the company's

level which involved the Human Resources personnel. Further discussions were then held

between representatives of company A (including the researcher) and the recruiting agency,

upon which, a decision was made to advertise the two positions online via internet access to

enable company A to add additional components, which are the online Language

Proficiency Test and Personality Test, which could not be made possible by means of

printed advertising.

**Figure 2:  Stages Involved in the Selection Process**

**Stage 1: Preliminary Stage**

Discussion with HR on vacant positions in Company A

Set requirements & guidelines for recruitment process

Appoint a recruitment agency. Both parties agreed on online mode for phase 1 screening.

**Stage 2: Selection Process 1**

Online advertisement commence and managed by recruitment agency

**Phase 1 : Screening**

(1) Online Proficiency Test
(2) Personality Test

Information based on Stage 1 Screening submitted to Company A:

(1) Candidates' Background
(2) Results of Proficiency Test
(3) Results of Personality Test

**Stage 3: Selection Process 2**

**Phase 2 : Interview (round 1)**

Shortlisting of Candidates for Final Interview

**Phase 3 : Final Interview**

4 shortlisted candidates invited

Upon selecting the option for a digital advertisement, an online advertisement was uploaded on the agency's website. The advertisement included the background of Company

A (address, website, nature of business etc.) as well as the criteria set forth for prospective candidates.

### 3.3.7.2 The Job Interviews

The series of interviews were conducted at company A's premise. The total duration taken to complete the whole interview process was three days - two days for the first interviews and another day was set for those who were selected to attend the final interview. A total number of ten (10) candidates comprising of an equal number of male and female candidates turned up for the first interview.

These candidates were grouped into two interview sessions for the first round of interviews. Candidates were placed in various interview sessions based on their availability for interview and not for any other particular reasons. Based on assessments made in those two days (sessions 1 & 2), four candidates were then shortlisted and was invited for the final round of the selection process. Table 3.5 below shows the schedule for the candidates' interview sessions.

**Table 3.5: Interview Schedule**

| DAY 1 | | |
|---|---|---|
| Candidates | Interview Sessions | Time |
| 1. FC1 | | 9.00 am |
| 2. FC2 | Session 1 | 10.00 am |
| 3. MC1 | | 11.00 am |
| 4. FC3 | | 2.00 pm |
| 5. MC2 | | 3.00 pm |
| **DAY 2** | | |
| 6. FC4 | | 9.00 am |
| 7. MC3 | Session 2 | 10.00 am |
| 8. MC4 | | 11.00 am |
| 9. MC5 | | 2.00 pm |
| 10. FC5 | | 3.00 pm |
| **DAY 3** | | |
| 1. MC1 | | 9.30 am |
| 2. FC5 | Final Interview | 11.30 am |
| 3. FC4 | | 2.00 pm |
| 4. MC5 | | 3.30 pm |

The interview panellists set an approximation of fifteen to thirty minutes (15 – 30 mins) for each interview with the candidates. According to these panellists, based on their experience, the duration spent for each interview would provide a clear indication of the candidates' performance. This is due to their principle that neither the candidates nor the interviewers themselves should be put in a position where both parties would be wasting each other's time when the candidates being interviewed evidently do not fit the company's requirements. Thus, it was expected some of the interview sessions would be shorter than the thirty minutes (3) allocated for each candidate.

On the other hand, based on the researcher's interview with the panellists, they have expressed willingness to spend more than half an hour on a candidate if the candidate

displays the criteria set forth by the company. This is to get a clearer picture of the individual by getting to know more about him/her.

During the interview, the panellists are provided with the following items:

(i)     The candidates' personal files which include their application letter, resume, results of their personality and proficiency test and copies of their credentials;

(ii)    Proposed interview questions that cover the following areas:

   (a)  Leadership qualities and ability to work and interest with others

   (b)  Adaptability and flexibility

   (c)  Initiative and resourcefulness

   (d)  Ability to plan and being goal oriented

   (e)  Motivation, confidence, and ability to do the job

                              (Refer to appendix 5 for sample of the proposed questions)

(iii)   Evaluation form that is used to appraise both candidates' 'hard skills' and 'soft skills'. The table below illustrates the criteria assessed during the job interviews.

**Table 3.6: Elements of 'Hard Skills' and 'Soft Skills' Assessed**

| 'Hard Skills' | 'Soft Skills' |
|---|---|
| Educational background<br>Experience (work & university) | Physical appearance<br>Personal traits<br>Confidence<br>Expression of ideas<br>Initiative<br>Mental alertness<br>Aspiration (motivation & ambition) |

(Source: Company A's EvaluationForm)

## 3.4 DataAnalysis

The data collected in this case study is examined using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This section presents the categories used for data analysis for both methods.

### 3.4.1 Quantitative Analysis

The data will be analyzed in three significant parts. This is to achieve congruency in dealing with the research questions. Part 1 of the analysis deals with the analysis of linguistic features that denote the differences in gender communication. As the researcher intends to draw a link between these differences and that of candidates' performance during the job interview, she has specifically focused on the occurrence of the followings:

- Floor apportionment
- Minimal responses
- Epistemic modal forms
- Interruptions

As such part 1 will demonstrate the use of quantitative analysis involving frequency counts of each feature mentioned above. Results of Part 1 will enable the researcher to illustrate if the frequency counts of each linguistic features made by both the candidates and the panellists, differ between gender. In a study conducted on males and females in a meeting, it was found that women tend to be interrupted more than men, and men tend to hold the floor longer (Holmes, 2008, Vanfossen, 1998).If differences do indeed exist in this local

study, then based on the frequency patterns, the researcher would be able to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Who talks more and longer?

2. Who provides more minimal responses?

3. Who uses more epistemic modal form?

4. Who interrupts more?

5. Who gets interrupted more?

Part 2 of the data analysis involves a two pronged strategy that allows the researcher to observe the relationship between the frequency counts of various linguistic features used by the candidates (established in Part 1) and their performance during the interview. As this study is more inclined towards earmarking success strategies employed by the candidates, cross-referencing is only made on the final shortlisted candidates. Quantitative analysis is again employed here to establish the relationship between the two, that of gender communication difference (based on frequency counts on linguisctic features used) and interviewers' evaluation on candidates' performance during the interview (based candidates' evaluation scores).

### 3.4.2   Qualitative Analysis

Transcriptions of four (4) final shortlisted candidates were subjected to discourse analysis to further unravel the significance of gender communication difference in reflecting elements of 'soft skills'.  Qualitative analysis is of the transcriptions and field notes are used to determine and analyze the quality of speech styles of the final shortlisted

candidates. Most importantly, feedback from panellists via interviews carried out by the researcher would provide the premises upon which the discourse analysis heavily depends. For example, panellists will be asked about their opinion on the each candidates based on the criteria set as illustrated in Table 3.4. Based on panellists' comments and responses, relevant speech, expression and even words uttered by candidates were isolated and extracted to be further examined. This is done so to specify the communication styles that is most favoured by the panellists. To a certain extent, panellists would also point out the utterances that they find had helped the candidates to perform well in the interviews.

Detailed conversation analysis would then be carried out on these extracts in relevance to persuasive communication, communication competence, social principles as well as the elements of 'soft-skills' or 'employability skills' that bear prominence in within these excerpts. Guiding this analysis would be the fundamentals of pragmatics that deals with social maxims of being relevant, precise, clear and sincere (Grice, 1975).

## 3.5  Summary

In this particular chapter, the researcher dealt with the description of research methodology and design that forms the groundwork of which this study is grounded to. Although the method of analysis is deemed paramount in this research, the procedure that the researcher undertook to obtain the data should also be treated with equal significant magnitude. This is due to the fact that the intricate procedure of data collection in this study is inimitable in which it allows the researcher ample room to explore the whole works and art of job interviewing.

Due to the nature of this case study, the researcher was only able to integrate the fundamentals of discourse analysis (analysis of overall framework on discourse) and pragmatics (taking into account the social principles of discourse). This is due to fact that a more substantial research project is needed to fully expound the elements of both tools. The data collected, nonetheless, was able to bear valuable findings that the researcher opines would be able to accomplish the objectives of this study.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 4.0   Introduction

This chapter brings about the findings of the essential works of analyzing data gathered from a case study for the present study.  This particular study aims to present the linguistics features of the language used by candidates in in an interview setting and compare the choice of linguistic strategies employed by male and female candidates.   Once the pattern of differences are distinguished, further analysis on the collated data is performed to draw a relationship between these differences and communication styles considered to be most preferable by the panel of interviewers which will provide Ultimately, the overall findings would also reveal whether the much favoured communication styles bear prominence between gender.

The data analysis was divided into three parts which invariably are very much related to one another and inadvertently, interdependent. Each part entails presentation of findings that provide answers and discussion to each of the research questions as stated in Chapter 1 of this study.

A cross tabulation of the frequency counts of these features are determined and discussions on the manner in which these linguistic features occurred are highlighted and explained explicitly with examples provided from the transcribed data.

## 4.1 Linguistic Features of the Candidates

This section presents the findings of Part 1 of data analysis that deals with identifying the communication patterns of both male and female candidates in a series of interviews carried out in this case study. Focus on specific linguistic features are made and further analysed to ascertain if there are indeed significant differences between genders. These features will be further classified to show the differences between genders, that of the candidates and the interviewers.

### 4.1.1 Floor Apportionment

Based on the interview sessions which were conducted individually amongst the candidates, differences could be observed on the floor apportionment between female and male candidates. For the purpose of this study, floor apportionment is measured based on the number of words uttered by the candidates to obtain the percentage of words spoken, number of turns in the form of questions posed by panellists to the candidates, and the average of turn length. This can be observed in Tables 4.4 and 4.5 below.

Table 4.4 indicates the floor apportionment of male candidates in this study whilst table 4.5 signifies the floor apportionment of female candidates. Each table includes the total number of words spoken by the candidates of each gender and also the total number of turns (questions) allocated for each gender. Male candidates are labelled as MC 1 to 5 and the female candidates, FC 1 to 5.

## Table 4.1: Floor Apportionment of Male Candidates

| Candidates | No. of Words Uttered by Candidate/ Total No. Of Words Uttered During Interview | % of Words Spoken | No. of Turns (Answers/responses to questions asked) | Average Turn Length (secs) | Interview Duration (mins) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MC 1 | 1730 / 2507 | 69 | 80 | 17 | 22.43 |
| MC 2 | 602 / 1254 | 48 | 103 | 7 | 12.15 |
| MC 3 | 740 / 1644 | 45 | 101 | 11 | 17.55 |
| MC 4 | 718 / 1596 | 45 | 120 | 8 | 15.52 |
| MC 5 | 1910 / 2547 | 75 | 73 | 20 | 24.51 |

**Total no. of words (M):**    **5700**
**Total no. of turns:**    **474**
**Total length of interview session:**   **1 hr 34mins (104 mins)**


## Table 4.2: Floor Apportionment of Female Candidates

| Candidates | No. of Words Uttered by Candidate/ Total No. Of Words Uttered During Interview | % of Words Spoken | No. of Turns (Answers/responses to questions asked) | Average Turn Length (secs) | Interview Duration (mins) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FC 1 | 580 / 1184 | 49 | 78 | 12 | 15.52 |
| FC 2 | 610 / 1196 | 51 | 105 | 8 | 14.21 |
| FC 3 | 683 / 1265 | 54 | 108 | 9 | 16.33 |
| FC 4 | 2355 / 3019 | 78 | 58 | 24 | 23.50 |
| FC 5 | 1930 / 3113 | 62 | 70 | 19 | 22.14 |

**Total no. of words (F):**    **6158**
**Total no. of turns:**    **419**
**Total interview duration:**   **1 hr 33mins (99 mins)**

Tables 4.1 and 4.2, show the distribution of floor apportionment of both the male and female candidates in the first stage of interviews in this case study. The percentage of words spoken as indicated in the tables point out the percentage of words uttered by a candidate over the **total** number of words spoken by that respective candidate and panel of interviewers throughout his/her interview session. For example, in the case of FC1, the total number of words uttered by the candidate is seen to be less than the total number of utterances made by her as well as the panellists. FC1 only uttered 49% of the total utterances in her interview session. This further indicates less floor apportionment being seized by FC1 in her interview session. The number of turns, on the other hand, indicates the frequency of responses provided by each candidate during the interview session.

At a glance, what can easily be noted is the total number of words uttered by the candidates and also the total number of turns that differ between the two genders. Although both groups were granted almost the same amount of time in terms of its total duration, the female candidates were seen to have spoken more during the interview as compared to their male counterparts as indicated by the number of words uttered. At this juncture, quantity of words uttered is taken into consideration against the quality of exchanges that took place. As observed in both tables, female candidates put together a total of 6208 (52%) number of words out of a total of 11,858 (100%) words uttered by both male and female. Although the difference was not much, more was uttered by the female candidates.

An interesting trend that can also be observed in the two tables above is the significance of the number of turns for each candidate. It should be noted that Candidate FC4 who has the highest number of words uttered (2355) had the least number of turns (n=58). As the number of turns indicates the number of answers or responses given by the candidates in

the interview, less number of turns in this case would denote the candidates' ability to hold the floor with each question posed to them. For example, although candidate MC5's interview session lasted for 24.51 minutes, his total number of turns was only 70 as compared to candidate MC4 who had 120 turns during his 15.52 minute interview. MC5 certainly has the most number of words uttered by a male candidate which totals up to the total of 1910 words. His average turn length was 20 seconds which points out that this particular candidate spent an average of 20 seconds for each of hisresponse. In other words, MC5 has the ability to hold the floor longer than the rest of the other male candidates in this interview session.

The same observable fact can be seen for female candidate FC4 who has the longest interview session (23.50 minutes), indeed has the most number of words uttered and the least number of turns. She is also observed to have spent an average of 24 seconds on each turn taken, which by far is the longest average time spent on each turn by a female candidate.

It is certainly interesting to note that although the figures in the female candidates' floor apportionment distribution generally indicate more total number of words uttered, it is FC4 who had actually pulled the weight by uttering the highest number of words as well as the longest average turn length. FC4 had even outdone MC5's (male candidate with the highest floor apportionment and longest average length) ability to hold the floor. This can be observed in table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Comparison between Male and Female candidates with Most Number of Turns and Longer Average Turn Length in Their Respective Gender Groups**

| Candidates | No. of Words | No. of Turns (Answers/responses to questions asked) | Average Turn Length (secs) | Interview Duration (mins) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| FC 4 | 2355 | 58 | 24 | 23.50 |
| MC 5 | 1910 | 73 | 20 | 24.51 |
| FC 5 | 1930 | 70 | 19 | 22.14 |
| MC 1 | 1730 | 80 | 17 | 22.43 |

Findings presented in Table 4.3 are sequenced in accordance to the total number of turns taken during their respective interview indicating candidates' ability to hold the floor; from the least number of turns taken to the most.

An interesting phenomenon can be observed in Table 4.3 which indicates that while FC4 proved that she had the most number of words uttered during her interview as compared to other candidates, she also took the least number of turns. MC5 whose interview session was comparatively the longest, on the other hand, had more turns than FC4. Although MC5's number of turns may very well be more than FC4's due to his interview duration which is longer, FC4's has certainly proven that she is able to hold the floor longer with an average turn length of 24 seconds as compared to MC5's 20 seconds.

Tables 4.4 and 4.5 also clearly show the consistency in conversation pattern that is apparent in the male candidates' performance during the job interview. All the female candidates appear to have a higher percentage (more than 50%) of words spoken as compared to those uttered by the panel of interviewers. In other words, female candidates were able to elaborate on their responses based on the questions posed by the panel of interviews. While the male candidates are observed to have spoken less than their interviewers in all interview sessions while the female candidates, on the other hand, did not show a similar trend.

What is apparent in the female candidates' floor apportionment pattern is that four out of five of the female (4/5) candidates had actually more words uttered as compared to the panellists. It was observed that female candidates had the ability to hold and retain the floor once granted to them, therefore, indicating the efforts made to elaborate and expand their responses.

Male candidates, on the other hand, was observed not making an effort to hold the floor more than necessary. MC2, for example, was unable to elaborate sufficiently and adequately when asked basic questions pertaining to his family and educational background. When asked on the number of family members, he answered in a single word "Five (5)" without further indicating if the number included both parents and without further elaboration on his other siblings. He also made several requests for questions to be repeated. His utterances took an average of seven (7) seconds per turn length which significantly indicated very short responses, notwithstanding, the long stretches of pauses in between those responses. This could be due to what Tannen (1990) terms as the 'report' talk which is the much-preferred form of speech amongst men. As with the case of MC2

talking about his family could be a topic that is very personal to him and therefore, chose to provide just the basic and necessary information.

FC4, on the other hand, has the highest total number of words uttered by female candidates; uttering 2455 words which is 78% of the total number of words spoken during the course of her interview session.  She only took 58 turns which significantly reflected her ability to hold and retain the floor.  This was even much longer than MC5 who has the longest floor apportionment amongst the male candidates.

On the whole, the most apparent observation that can be made with regards to floor apportionment amongst the candidates isthe suggestion that female candidates have the higher percentage of floor apportionment and number of words spokenas compared to male candidates. This denotes their ability to hold and maintain the floor longer with regards to questions asked during job interviews. Thefindings of this study tends torefute the dominance approach that stresses male dominance in mixed group interactions such as one exemplified by Woods (1996) in her study to establish male superiority in mixed group interactions.

### 4.1.2   Epistemic Modal Forms

There has indeed been contrasting viewpoints on the interpretation of epistemic modal forms used in a speech. Some of the words associated with epistemic modal forms are "perhaps", "really", "sort of" and "probably". Interestingly, through the data gathered by the researcher other frequently as well as regularly used epistemic modal forms have been identified in words such as "like", "basically" and expressions such as "you know".

In analysing the data collected in this study, the researcher's main intent is to ascertain the total number of epistemic modals used by both female and male candidates during a series of job interviews. This is to determine if there are, in actual fact, differences in the way female and male interviewers use epistemic modal forms to influence the interviewers' opinion of them. These differences are essentially measured by means of frequency counts to determine who (between female and male candidates) uses the epistemic modal forms more than the other.

Through the data collected, the researcher was able to identify eight (8) words/expressions that were commonly and regularly used by candidates. To this end, the researcher has decided to draw attention to these forms as these are words/expressions that have been used by candidates in a semantically and syntactically correct manner. This is essential in eliminating words/expressions used by chance or pure ignorance on the part of the candidates that would fail to provide a clear reflection on the true purpose of using them.

Data in Tables 4.4 and 4.5 exhibit the number of epistemic modal forms used in female candidates' speech and male candidates' speech respectively during a job interview.

**Table 4.4: Epistemic Modals Usedby Female Candidates**

| Epistemic Modals | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • "perhaps" | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| • "probably" | - | - | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| • "really" | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| • "like" | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 4 |
| • "maybe" | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 1 |
| • "basically" | - | - | - | 3 | 1 |
| • "actually" | 4 | 3 | - | - | 3 |
| • "you know" | - | - | - | - | - |
| *Sub Total* | *7* | *8* | *4* | *14* | *12* |
| **Total** | **45** | | | | |

Table 4.4 illustrates the use of epistemic modal forms amongst female candidates. A record of 45 epistemic modal forms were used which further indicates that the female candidates use more epistemic modal forms as compared to their male counterparts. The male candidates in this study had only used a total of 33 epistemic modals. FC4 has also been found to use the most number of epistemic modals in her speech.

**Table 4.5: Epistemic Modals Used by Male Candidates**

| Epistemic Modals | M1 | M2 | M3 | M4 | M5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • "perhaps" | - | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| • "probably" | 1 | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| • "really" | 3 | - | - | - | 2 |
| • "like" | 1 | 1 | - | - | 1 |
| • "maybe" | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| • "basically" | - | - | - | - | 2 |
| • "actually" | 2 | 3 | - | 1 | - |
| • "you know" | - | - | - | 3 | 8 |
| *Sub Total* | *7* | *4* | *-* | *6* | *16* |
| **Total** | **33** | | | | |

Table 4.5 indicates that the male candidates in this study evidently used less epistemic modals in their conversations during their interview sessions. MC5 is seen as the male candidate that used the most number of epistemic modals (n= 5) in his responses.

A clear cut analysis can be derived from the data which indicates that epistemic modal forms is more frequently used amongst the female candidates as opposed to the male candidates. This is in consistent with Coates' (2004) suggestion that these forms are much more popularly used by women as compared to men.

However, whether or not they signify uncertainty in the points put forth by the speaker as suggested by Lakoff (2004) is subject to further discussion. This is because under detailed discourse analysis of the candidates' speech patterns, the researcher discovers a contradicting indication as opposed to suggestions prompted by Lakoff (2004) with regards to the use of epistemic modal forms to indicate uncertainty and hesitation especially amongst women. This will be further elaborated in part three (section 4.3) of this chapter where discourse analysis on the candidates' speech are carried out to identify the most favoured types of speech that panellists find most effective in the interview.

In order to completely understand the extend of epistemic modal use amongst the candidates, it is rather imperative to note Rosliza's (2005) findings in a pilot project carried out in a job interview in Malaysia. The outcome of her findings on the use of correct epistemic modal forms amongst Malaysian candidates points out to a new discovery that reveals candidates that use more epistemic modal forms are amongst those who are more competent and fluent in the language used. This is because only those who are linguistically competent would have the ability to use the epistemic modals in the correct form. Subsequently, the higher usage of epistemic modal forms amongst the female candidates indicate higher level of linguistic and communicative competence as compared to their male counterparts.

### 4.1.3   Minimal Responses

Minimal responses are small utterances which in many cases, interrupt ongoing conversations. According to Coates (2004), the purpose of minimal responses is to show support and show interest in what other participants say. They can also be used to show that

the person had listened to what was just said. It is also essential to note Lakoff's (2004) assertion that the use of minimal responses are considered as typical of how women use language Nonetheless, in relation to this case study, minimal responses uttered by the candidates reflect hesitant and uncertainty in responding to the panellists questions.

Tables 4.6 and 4.7 show the number of minimal responses made by both male and female candidates in this interview. Female candidates had made a total of 73 minimal responses throughout their interview sessions, whilst the male candidates had only used 55 minimal responses. Clearly, minimal responses are much more popularly used by the female candidates in this interview.

**Table 4.6: Minimal Responses by Female Candidates**

| Minimal Responses | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • "hmm…" | 10 | 12 | 10 | 5 | 10 |
| • "aah…" | 4 | 3 | 2 | 2 | - |
| • "eer..." | 5 | 5 | 2 | - | 2 |
| • "oh…" | - | 1 | - | - | - |
| *Sub Total* | *19* | *21* | *14* | *7* | *12* |
| **Total** | **73** | | | | |

The above table also clearly indicates that FC4 who has been pointed out as having the highest floor-apportionment during her interview used the least number of minimal responses. FC1 who had the least floor apportionment obviously used more minimal responses during her interview. This could be an indication that FC4's ability to speak more

andhold the floor longer equates her ability to use less minimal responses which in this case denotes uncertainty, hesitant and candidates' problem of finding the right words or expressions to respond to interviewers' questions.

**Table 4.7:  Minimal Responses by Male Candidates**

| Minimal Responses | M1 | M2 | M3 | M4 | M5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • "hmm…" | 10 | 8 | 9 | 2 | 10 |
| • "aah…" | - | 3 | 2 | 3 | - |
| • "eer..." | - | 4 | 3 | 1 | - |
| • "oh…" | - | - | - | - | - |
| *Total* | *10* | *15* | *14* | *6* | *10* |
| **Total** | **55** | | | | |

As observed in Table 4.7, the male candidates used less minimal responses throughout their respective interview sessions. This could very well be an indication that male candidates are less demonstrative when responding to interview questions. As these minimal responses indicate uncertainty and hesitant, male candidates could very well be seen to avoid using these minimal responses as it may indicate  weaknesses on their part. This clearly shows a high level of competitiveness as asserted by Coates (2004).

**4.2     Linguistic Features of Interview Panellists**

The linguistic features that were distinctively used by panellists in this case study can be observed in the use of two major features namely the use of minimal responses and interruptions made.

### 4.2.1   Minimal Responses of Panellists

The total number of minimal responses expressed by each panellist for this study is deemed imperative as the outcome would be able to indicate whether the minimal responses produced by the female interviewer differ in purpose than of those produced by the male interviewer or vise-versa. It is also to establish if these minimal responses would have an impact on candidates' performance during the interview.

Minimal responses uttered by the panel of panellists in this study are seen to serve two main purposes.  First, they act as cues to indicate interest and comprehension whilst the second, is an indication that they were unable to comprehend or even understand what is being said by the candidates.  Based on the researcher's observation on interviewers' facial expression and body language when uttering them, minimal responses fall in either two of these categories.

This is in agreement with Ryan's (2001) assertion on the role of minimal responses in a job interview and was further confirmed by the interview panellists in this study when they were interviewed after the session. It was based on the facial expression and body language of the panellists that the researcher was able to distinguish what was indicated with their minimal responses.  The researcher  as an observer in the interviews conducted was able to discern the signals that indicate difference in both type of minimal responses.

Accordingly, the researcher decided to divide these minimal responses into two sub-groups of "Positive Minimal Response" and "Negative Minimal Response". There were instances of overlapping between the two sub-categories where one minimal response was used to

indicate both positive and negative responses. This, however was distinguished through the panellists' tone of expressing the minimal response and the facial expressions that follow. For example, a "hmm…" expressed by an interviewer can be taken to mean "yes I am interested in what you are saying and do go on…" when expressed with a rising tone and followed by a nod and perhaps a smile from the interviewer. The same "hmmm…" , nevertheless, could mean " I don't quite get it …" when expressed with a descending tone that sometimes stretches to a monotone and followed by a frown by the panellists.

Realizing that both forms of minimal response imply different sentiments on the part of the panellists, the researcher has taken the move to separate between the two to provide a better picture of the interviewers' first sense of notion and impression of the candidates' ways of managing a job interview. This can clearly be seen in Tables 4.8 and 4.9 where both forms of minimal responses (positive and negative) are distinguished clearly of their usage by panellists towards candidates of opposite genders.  Panellists are labelled as PF (female) and PM (male).

**Table 4.8:Minimal Responses of PF  Towards Male Candidates**

| Positive Minimal Responses | M1 | M2 | M3 | M4 | M5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • "hmm…" | 8 | 4 | 4 | 3 | 6 |
| • "ya…" | 8 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 7 |
| • "right.." | 8 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 6 |
| • "uh-huh" | 6 | - | 1 | 2 | 4 |
| • "ok…" | 9 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 11 |
| • "oh…" | 7 | 2 | - | 3 | 3 |
| *Sub total* | *46* | *14* | *12* | *15* | *37* |
| **Total** | **124** | | | | |
| Negative Minimal Responses | M1 | M2 | M3 | M4 | M5 |
| • "hmmm…" (uncertain) | - | - | 2 | 4 | - |
| • "Ookaayy…" (not convinced) | - | - | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| • "Oh!..." (Shock/disbelief) | - | - | - | 2 | 3 |
| *Sub Total* | - | - | *3* | *7* | *5* |
| **Total** | **15** | | | | |

**Table 4.9:  Minimal Responses by PM towards Male Candidates**

| Positive Minimal Responses | M1 | M2 | M3 | M4 | M5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • "hmm…" | 3 | - | 2 | 1 | - |
| • "ya…" | 3 | 2 | - | - | 1 |
| • "right.." | - | - | - | 2 | - |
| • "uh-huh" | - | - | - | - | - |
| • "ok…" | 4 | - | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| • "oh…" | 2 | 1 | - | 1 | - |
| *Sub Total* | *12* | *3* | *4* | *5* | *2* |
| **Total** | **26** | | | | |
| Negative Minimal Responses | M1 | M2 | M3 | M4 | M5 |
| • "hmmm…" (uncertain) | - | 1 | - | - | 2 |
| • "Ookaayy…" (not convinced) | - | - | - | - | 1 |
| • "Oh!..." (Shock/disbelief) | - | 1 | - | 2 | 1 |
| *Sub Total* | *-* | *2* | *-* | *2* | *4* |
| **Total** | **8** | | | | |

Table 4.8 points out the number of minimal responses uttered by PF during the interview sessions with the male candidates (MC) and table 4.9 illustrates the number of minimal responses uttered by PM during the same interview sessions. As can be observed, PF's use

of minimal responses is more (124 in total)  as compared to PM who only used a total of 26 minimal responses throughout the interview sessions held with male candidates. This is consistent with Holmes' (1995) suggestion that the use of minimal response is indeed a "female specialty". As with Ryan's (2001) notion onminimal responses, the researcher was able to relate to this viewpoint by observing the number of positive and negative minimal responses uttered by both PF and PM.

Evidently, as indicated by Fishman (1979) and Holmes (1995) women are known to use minimal responses as back chanelling to show interest and support for the speaker to continue speaking, PF in this study has also clearly demonstrated the supportive conversation style through the use 124 positive minimal response while interviewing male candidates. There were only 15 out of 124 (12%) minimal responses used by PFthat were negative with 6 indicating uncertainties, 4 unconvinced responses and 5 indicating disbeliefs.

PM, on the other hand, uttered a higher number of negative minimal responses. A total of 8 negative minimal responses were used over 26 that were uttered, at approximately 30.8% of total minimal responses he uttered. What can be drawn here is the fact that although PM used less number of minimal responses, a big percentage of it was negative as compared to PF's use of negative minimal responses which only amounted to 12% of her total number of minimal responses.

Essentially, comparison must also be made on the use of minimal responses between both panellists during their interview sessions with the female candidates to ascertain if the same

number and types of minimal responses were used for female candidates. This can be observed in Tables 4.10 and 4.11 below.

**Table 4.10:   Minimal Responses by PF Towards Female Candidates**

| Positive Minimal Responses | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • "hmm…" | 3 | 2 | 2 | 11 | 6 |
| • "ya…" | 2 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| • "right.." | - | 1 | 1 | 7 | 6 |
| • "uh-huh" | - | 1 | 4 | 6 | 5 |
| • "ok…" | 4 | 5 | 12 | 20 | 12 |
| • "oh…" | 3 | 2 | 10 | 13 | 10 |
| *Sub Total* | *12* | *13* | *35* | *63* | *44* |
| **Total** | **167** | | | | |
| **Negative Minimal Responses** | **F1** | **F2** | **F3** | **F4** | **F5** |
| • "hmmm…" (uncertain) | 1 | 1 | 2 | - | - |
| • "Ookaayy…" (not convinced) | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | - |
| • "Oh!..." (Shock/disbelief) | 1 | 1 | 2 | - | - |
| *Sub Total* | *4* | *3* | *5* | *-* | *-* |
| **Total** | **12** | | | | |

The pattern observed for the use of minimal responses between both panellists is similar to those observed in the previousTables 4.8 and 4.9 for male candidates. PF is seen to be using more minimal positive minimal responses as compared to PM. A total of 167 positive

minimal responses were used by PF as opposed to only 18 used by PM towards female candidates. PF is also observed to use less negative minimal responses (12) towards female candidates as opposed to a slightly higher number of negative minimal responses (15) when interviewing the male candidates.

Next, Tables 4.11 present the frequency of minimal responses used by panellists towards male candidates.

**Table 4.11:    Minimal Responses made by PM towards Female Candidates**

| Positive Minimal Responses | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| • "hmm…" | 1 | - | - | 1 | 1 |
| • "ya…" | 1 | - | - | 2 | - |
| • "right.." | - | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| • "uh-huh" | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| • "ok…" | 1 | - | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| • "oh…" | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| *Total* | *3* | *1* | *2* | *8* | *4* |
| **Total** | **18** | | | | |
| **Negative Minimal Responses** | **F1** | **F2** | **F3** | **F4** | **F5** |
| • "hmmm…" (uncertain) | - | - | - | - | - |
| • "Ookaayy…" (not convinced) | - | - | - | - | - |
| • "Oh!..." (Shock/disbelief) | - | - | - | - | - |
| **Total** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** | **-** |

Interestingly, however, PM did not use any negative minimal responses on female candidates as opposed to PF, who used 12 negative minimal responses on female candidates. The trend above clearly supports Holmes's (1995) that indicates minimal responses as being a 'female speciality'.

## 4.2.2   Interruptions

For the purpose of this study, the research intends to ascertain two (2) factors. One, if interruptions on the part of the interviewers (both male and female) differs in patterns when interviewing either male and female candidates and two, who, between the male and female candidates interrupt more than the other.

Essentially, the patterns of interruptions made by the interviewers will indicate if dominance and power are in play between both male and female interviewers when interviewing a candidate. Interruptions made by candidates, on the other hand, will indicate their ability to take hold or seize the floor from another and in this case, the candidates seizing the opportunity to seize the floor in respond to the panellists' questions and remarks.

Findings of the study found two (2) types of interruptions. The first type of interruption that was discerned by the researcher is one that reflects a supportive form of intervention. This can be distinguished when the person who is interrupting finishes off the speaker's sentences indicating support and interest in the speaker's conversation. This can clearly be observed in situations where the panellists display a high interest and attention in the essence of the interviewees' speech.

The negative form of interruptions being identified by the researcher is one that abruptly stops the other speaker in the middle of his/her speech to either completely change the topic of discussion or to drop comments or disagree with the speaker's points of view. This happens without any opportunity or possibility for the speaker to finish off his/her sentences. Representation of interruptions made by both male and female interviewers on candidates can be seen as presented in table 4.12.

**Table 4.12: Interruptions by Female and Male Panellists on Female Candidates**

| Types of Interruptions | | F1 | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 | Total # of Interruptions Received |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PF | Positive | - | - | - | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| | Negative | - | - | - | - | - | 0 |
| PM | Positive | - | - | - | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| | Negative | 1 | 3 | - | - | - | 4 |

Table 4.12 illustrates the total number of positive interruptions made by PF towards female candidates as 7 times as opposed to 3 positive interruptions made by PM towards female candidates. Although PF did not make any negative interruptions towards female candidates while they are talking, PM on the other hand, made 4 negative interruptions during female candidates' speech.

**Table 4.13:** **Representation of Interruptions Made by Female and Male Panellistson Male Candidates**

| Types of Interruptions | | M1 | M2 | M3 | M4 | M5 | Total # of Interruptions Received |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PF | Positive | 3 | - | - | - | 3 | 6 |
| | Negative | - | - | - | - | - | 0 |
| P M | Positive | 3 | - | - | - | 1 | 4 |
| | Negative | - | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 5 |

Table 4.13 shows the interruptions made by both male and female panellists towards male candidates. PF made 6 positive interruptions during the male candidates' interview session. She did not however, make any negative interruptions. PM, on the other hand, made 5 negative interruptions towards the male candidates.

Data in Tables 4.12 and 4.13 exhibit the number of interruptions made by female and male panellists on both male and female candidates, respectively. In analyzing the data reflected in Tables4.12 and 4.13, it is essential to note that the interruptions made by the panel of interviewers are the ones being closely observed as these are the interruptions that are viewed to have an impact and influence on candidates' ability to manage the flow and substance of their speech. Although PM was observed to have made more negative interruptions and more towards the male candidates, this should not be necessarily seen as a male dominance mode of conversation. As Tannen (1990) cautions, that interruptions need not reflect dominance. In identifying interruptions, substance of the conversation needs to be taken into account. Further to this, it can also be taken as difference in conversational

style. In this case, PM could be seen as playing his role as an interviewer who wants to get the right answers in the shortest amount of time. In other words, he is a man who does not want to waste much of his or the candidates' time by going about the conversation aimlessly.

Stewart and Cash (2002), however, suggest that the process of asking and answering questions is indeed the essence of an interview. In this regard, interruptions made by the interviewers, regardless of the forms they may take, can be viewed as having the power to either reduce or enhance candidates' chances of having a good control of managing their interview sessions.

Analyzing the interruptions made by the interviewers is also imperative as the analysis outcome will have a firm stance in contesting Stubbe's (1991) view that interruptions in a job interview is deemed as disruption on another's turn and restricting their contributions, in this case, the candidates' contributions to the interview. The researcher intends to highlight the new dimension of interruptions encountered during the course of this study; that is of the positive form of interruptions that not only heightens the enthusiasm of the candidates but also acts as a catalyst to meaningful exchanges during a job interview.

There is indeed very minimal difference in the total number of interruptions made by the interviewers on candidates when taking into account their gender difference. In other words, PF made 7 interruptions on the female candidates and 6 interruptions on the male candidates, which does not clearly reflect difference in attitude towards candidates, regardless of their gender. Similarly, PM made 7 interruptions on female candidates and 9

interruptions on male candidates. As such, gender difference here does not account for the number of interruptions imposed upon the candidates.

Interestingly, however, what can clearly be denoted in this analysis is the fact that the PM in this study makes 9 negative interruptions when interviewing candidates as opposed to PF who had only made one negative interruptions. This is consistent with Hirshman (1973) as well as Zimmerman and West (1975) all of whom indicate that women tend to adhere to polite social forms of speech and are most often to interrupt less in a conversation. In the case of this study, PF did not make a single negative interruption that in many ways could have hindered the candidates' chances of performing well in the interview. She, on the other hand, displayed a supportive role in making 13 positive interruptions which inadvertently prompted the candidates to feel more at ease and confident during the interview.

In contrast, PM was less generous with his positive interruptions but it was observed that he had no problems making it clear to the candidates that he did not wish to continue listening to them by making 9 negative interruptions. These negative interruptions not only cut off the candidates' speech abruptly but also deteriorate their confidence level prompting them to talk less during their interview session. An example can be seen below on how PM interrupted candidate MC2 when he admitted that he did not have the time to find out more about the company that was interviewing him.

**Excerpt 1:**

PF     :     Ok En. ### are there any questions that you would like to ask us?

MC2   :     Err ya… ya, can I know what the company actually do ah <laugh>?

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| PM | : | Why don't you tell us? I'm sure you did some kind of research on our background ::: at least interested to find out what we do. |
| MC2 | : | Oh I think, umm I just got back from Pahang yesterday and I've been rushing to \<chuckle\> so, I cannot find the website. I think it's about IT, [and] |
| PM | : | No, No \<shaking head\> you obviously don't know what we do. |
| PF | : | En. ### before you come for an interview, it's always essential that you do some research about the company first ya. |
| MC2 | : | \<Nods\> |

Based on the example provided in Excerpt 1, the candidate was observed to be affected by PM's negative interruptions that resulted to his inability to resume the conversation in a lighter tone and atmosphere as he experienced prior to the interruption. This was also detected in all cases whereby when all of these negative interruptions were made, none of the candidates were observed to retaliate and seize the control of the conversation from PM. In other words, once a negative interruption is imposed upon the candidates, they are not able to carry on the conversation that could very well be their ultimate moment of performing successfully in the interview.

Having established the different role that both positive and negative interruptions have, it is pertinent to further establish that positive interruptions do play a part in promoting higher control of conversation for candidates in a job interview. This can evidently be observed by drawing a link between data in Tables 4.15 and 4.16 (representation of interruptions made by interviewers towards male and female candidates) and data in Tables 4.4 & 4.5 (representations of floor apportionment of male and female candidates respectively in a job interview). What can be examined here is the link between the types of interruptions imposed on the candidates and their average turn length and interview duration. Candidates

that receive a higher number of positive interruptions are seen to be having longer interview sessions and higher average turn length.

However, the more important deduction that should be made here is the fact that both male and female candidates received equal number of both negative and positive interruptions. Both male and female candidates received 10 positive interruptions from the panellists, as well as, similar number of negative interruptions (male – 4, female – 3). In other words, both male and female candidates had equal chances of performing well in the interview.

## 4.3 Communication Differences of Male and Female Candidates In Relation to Marks Awarded

It can now be established in Section 4.2 that there are indeed differences in communicative patterns of male and female candidates in a job interview as carried out in this study. The next stage of analysis is to perform a cross referencing between these communicative differences and candidates' performance based on their evaluation scores. This is to ascertain if differences in communication patterns between male and female candidates brings about different impact on their performance during the interview.

During the interview candidates are being evaluated and assessed based on an evaluation sheet used by interviewers (refer appendix 4). Marks were rewarded based on candidates' performance throughout the interview sessions which covers 9 essential aspects. The afore-mentioned aspects are as follows:

- Physical appearance
- Personal Traits
- Confidence

- Expression of Ideas

- Experience

- Education

- Initiative

- Mental Alertness

- Motivation & Ambition

Table 4.14 illustrates the evaluation score of each candidate being awarded by the interviewers. This data reflect the crucial indicator that denotes higher scores equates higher chances of success. Based on the average score attained by the candidates, a clear indication can be derived which points out that generally the female candidates had performed better in the interview sessions in this study. The total average score for female candidates is 22 points higher than those of the male candidates'.

**Table 4.14:  Candidates' Average Evaluation Score**

| Candidates / Aspects of Evaluation | FI | F2 | F3 | F4 | F5 | M1 | M2 | M3 | M4 | M5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Physical Appearance | 5 | 6 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 9 |
| Personal Traits | 5 | 5 | 7 | 10 | 9 | 10 | 3 | 5 | 5 | 7 |
| Confidence | 4 | 2 | 6 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 2 | 6 | 6 | 9 |
| Expression Of Ideas | 6 | 4 | 5 | 10 | 9 | 8 | 4 | 6 | 4 | 8 |
| Experience | 4 | 2 | 6 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 7 |
| Education | 5 | 5 | 5 | 9 | 8 | 10 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 6 |
| Initiative | 6 | 5 | 6 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 8 |

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mental Alertness | 5 | 2 | 5 | 9 | 7 | 8 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 7 |
| Motivation & Ambition | 5 | 4 | 6 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 4 | 5 | 4 | 9 |
| *Sub Total ( /90 )* | *45* | *35* | *53* | *84* | *73* | *80* | *32* | *46* | *40* | *70* |
| **Total** | **290** | | | | | **268** | | | | |

Having established in Part I (sections 4.1 and 4.2) that the elements which could work against or for both male and female candidates are equal, it can now be confirmed that female candidates in this study had performed better in the job interview as compared to their male counterparts. A closer study on the different communicative patterns between male and female candidates in Part I, assumption can be drawn that the female types of communicative patterns had worked well in favour of the female candidates. Essentially, analyzing the female candidates' communication style is pertinent to account for their strong ability to perform better in the interview.

Based on analysis in Part I, candidates who appear to have the ability to hold the floor have also been observed to obtain higher scores as compared to those who are less able to do so.

Consequently, as the female candidates hold a higher record of floor-apportionment, the average evaluation scores too are higher than those of their male counterparts. This can be clearly observed especially in the case of FC4 who holds the highest record of floor apportionment especially in the number of words uttered and average turn length during her interview session.

Although female candidates produce a higher number of minimal responses, which were inadvertently supposed to be working against them as they indicate hesitant and uncertainty, this does not however affect their performance during their interview sessions. Nonetheless, what could have worked very well for female candidates in this job interview is the fact that they received a higher number of positive minimal responses from both panellists. The total number of negative minimal responses is also less as compared to those received by the male candidates. Table 4.15 further illustrates the comparison drawn by the researcher on the Minimal Responses received by candidates from the interview panellists.

**Table 4.15:  Comparison of Minimal Responses (MR) Received by Candidates**

| Total Positive MR | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Used by FI on Male Candidates | Used by MI on Male Candidates | Used by FI on Female Candidates | Used by MI on Female Candidates |
| 124 | 26 | 167 | 18 |
| Total Negative MR | | | |
| Used by FI on Male Candidates | Used by MI on Male Candidates | Used by FI on Female Candidates | Used by MI on Female Candidates |
| 15 | 8 | 12 | 0 |

Comparison made of data in Table 4.15 clearly illustrates the number of minimal responses used on the candidates that has an effect on their performance during the interview. As the data shows that female candidates received a higher number of positive MR (n=185) as compared to the male candidates who received only 150 MR, this could be presumed to have an impact on the candidates' evaluation score during the interview. As Ryan (2001) points out, minimal response can be taken as an indication from the part of the interviewers to mean high interest and attention, this could have acted as an advantage on the female candidates as well as motivation to perform better than their male counterparts.

The same could also be observed on the difference of using epistemic modal forms amongst the candidates that have affected their performance during the interview. As can be observed in Tables 4.4 and 4.5 in Section 4.1, the female candidates used a higher number of epistemic modals with a total average of 45 as compared to the male candidates who only used an average of 33 epistemic modals.

The use of epistemic modals by the female candidates in this job interview could very well be in consistent with Coates (2004) suggestion that the use of epistemic modals are much more popularly used by women to signify efforts in softening their utterance and indicate cooperative conversation styles. This certainly has a favourable effect on female candidates' performance during their interview sessions as clearly reflected in their evaluation scores (refer to Table 4.14).

Perhaps,it can now be established in this section that gender communication differences as apparent in Part I do have significance bearing in affecting candidates' performance in a job interview. This has been successfully ascertained when these differences were put against the evaluation scores that each candidate had obtained during their interview sessions. This can evidently be seen in the obvious patterns of correlation between communication patterns of both male and female candidates and the marks awarded to them.

## 4.4     Communication Styles Most Preferred by Panellists

As mentioned in the earlier part of this chapter, analysis in this section involves an in depth analysis of discourse patterns of 4 shortlisted candidates – FC4, FC5, MC1 and MC 5. These were candidates who have been invited to the final round of the interview which was

held a week after the first one took place. They were selected based on their evaluation scores during each of their interview session. Table 4.16 below shows the listing of the candidates who have been shortlisted into the final round of the interview in accordance to the scores obtained by each of them (from the highest to the lowest).

**Table 4.16:    Language Performance and Evaluation Scores of  Shortlisted Candidates**

| Candidates | No. of Words Uttered | Average Turn Length (secs) | Interview Duration (mins) | Evaluation Scores |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.   FC 4 | 2455 | 24 | 25.50 | 84 |
| 2.   MC 1 | 1730 | 17 | 22.43 | 80 |
| 3.   FC 5 | 1980 | 19 | 24.14 | 73 |
| 4.   MC 5 | 1910 | 20 | 23.51 | 70 |

Based on the candidates' performance above, ultimately candidates FC4 and MC1 were selected to join Company A. Between the 4 final candidates who were invited to the final round of the interview, the panellists had paid special attention to three of them (FC4, MC1 and MC5). FC5 was considered as the weakest contender due to her average communication skills and competency in the target language. In this regard, the panellists were observed to be paying more attention to candidates FC1, MC1 and MC5 as these candidates displayed the essential qualities and values that is close to the panellists' expectations. Consequently, special focus is made on the communication styles employed by these 3 candidates.

Selection of FC4 was evidently clear from the start of this study as she has consistently outperformed others to warrant the highest score for her interview. Upon closer observation ofthe interview transcripts, it was denoted that there were other elements that had contributed to her performance during the interview. This can be derived from the evaluation sheet used to evaluate candidates. Remarks from the panel of panellists were recorded for each of the candidate.

The panellists had remarked that FC4 was very confident and possess a high level of communication skills. She was also said to be presentable, polite and poised. The interviewers further remarked that FC4 is highly motivated and is seen to be able to work independently. This can clearly be observed in FC4's interview transcripts that are in consistence with the interviewers' views. Based on her transcripts, FC4 had demonstrated a high level of confidence by displaying a similar level of assertiveness in her speech as commented by panel of interviewers in her evaluation form. An example can be observed below:

**Excerpt 2:**

PM      :      (…) how do you think about working in a small company like ours?

FC4     :      **Yes. I am very comfortable working in a small team**. In fact I … you
know I always feel working in small group can be…. ah…. what do you call it… er …comforting. We know each other very well and …and the weaknesses and strength, well we can capitalize on each other's strength and work on the weaknesses.

PM      :      Because you know why/ ::: my common problem from most people especially (…), they're expecting a huge, big organization with all the corporate looking thing, you know.

PF       :      Ehemm…

FC4　　:　　**Ahh I see**… I understand…because huge companies have more attractive perks than small companies. But I think… you know, it's all in the mind set, like **I don't focus onhuge big companies** but rather… right… **I focus more on personal growth**, where I can … I can most likely grow with the company. **I am confident**… **really confident** that I will benefit a lot more in smaller companies… because I see it like… uhm you know… working as a family.

The excerpt from FC4's interview transcripts above display FC4's diplomatic ability to address the panel of interviewers' reservation about candidates' willingness to work in a small company. FC4 was able to convince her interviewers that not only is she willing to work in a smaller company but also sees it as an opportunity to grow with it. She also views working in a smaller team has its own benefits.

The deployment of assertive language by FC4 especially when she asserted that she focuses more on the professional development aspect of joining a company rather than the size of the company certainly puts her in a good stance during the interview. This is in line with Barone and Switzer's (1995) view that equates assertive language with self-confidence. This, however, contradicts Brovermann et.al (1970) who claim that assertiveness in women is often perceived negatively as being impolite. In the case of FC4, her assertiveness was not taken to be improper or impolite by her interviewers but rather had worked to her advantage when eventually she was offered to join the company.

FC4 was also perceived to be polite and respectful by the panel of penallists. This can be observed in the excerpt of her interview transcripts below:

**Excerpt 3**:

Example 1

PF     :        Okay, ###, this is our Managing Director Mr. ###

FC4   :        Hello, it is a **real pleasure**to..to meet both of you <smile>

Example 2

PF     :        I have another question for you ###

FC4   :        **Of course**… sure..sure, I'll try my best.
Example 3

PF     :        So you don't have anymore questions for us. Well thank you for coming.

PM   :        Thank you for coming.
FC4   :        **Thank you**… **thank you** for the opportunity… for letting me be here
                <smile>

FC4 scored a perfect 10 on the aspect of Personal Traits from the panellists' evaluation which is a clear indication that her ability to combine politeness and assertiveness in her speech during the interview was well perceived by her interviewers. This can be observed in excerpt 2 in which FC4 used back channels to support information provided by the interviewers. Generous use of back channels can also be detected throughout FC4's interview transcripts as seen in the excerpt below.

**Excerpt 6**

PF     :        He's not interested because he needs to move away from where he is now,
                his comfort zone is in KL…

FC4   :        Hmm… **yes**… **yes**… **I see** <smile>

PF     :        And you definitely need to convince him. He needs to move to Penang for
                example. But he is the best candidate that your client wants…

FC4   :        Right… **right** … **I understand**. So I basically need to convince him… to
                be interested in my offer ya? <laugh>

PF      :    Ya… ya … <laugh along> let's see what you can do.

As can be observed in the excerpt above, FC4 employed the use of back channels to indicate to the panel of interviewers that the mock situation being put forth to her did not pose as an intimidation to her but rather she was willing to play along with the role given to her. This has created a more relax atmosphere of which interviewers and interviewee could get along well and actually enjoying the session. In doing so, FC4 has successfully fulfilled the maxims of quality and relation in the discourse that takes place as asserted by Grice (1975). Similarly, another candidate MC1 who had been selected to join the company had scored very high in the aspect of personal traits. As with FC4, MC1 too had scored a perfect 10.

Interestingly, however, unlike FC4's performance which was consistent from the beginning of this study MC1 did not display similar trends. This can clearly be seen when comparisons are drawn between the speech patterns of MC1 and another candidate MC5.

Data analysis in Part 1 (section 4.2) shows that MC5 holds the higher record of floor apportionment as well as number of words spoken during his interview session. Having earlier determined that a candidate who is able to hold and retain the floor once given to him/her reflect ability to perform better, MC5 is seen to have a better chance of success in this interview. The evaluation scores, however, proves otherwise. This provides evidence that there are perhaps other elements involvedthat had swayed off MC5's chances of being employed with the company. MC1, on the other hand, possess the qualities that had worked well for him and enabled him to outperform MC5.

MC1's evaluation sheet reveals that the panellists felt that he was a suitable candidate for the position being offered as he had the right background and training for the job. His participation in the discourse taking place during his interview session has indicate success in fulfilling the maxim of relation; where his responses were found to be very much relevant to what the panellists were looking for. He also had the opportunity of internship in the right field as required by the company. This sets him apart from MC5 whom, although has better communication skills, did not however have the kind of training and background as MC1. Furthermore, the panel of panellists also found MC1 to be pleasant, polite and modest as remarked in his evaluation sheet. They had also remarked MC1 to be 'genuine' and 'sincere' as recorded by PF in his evaluation sheet. This can be detected in excerpts of his interview transcripts below:

**Excerpt 7:**

Example 1

PF       :       &lt;laughing&gt; so, you didn't discover how to do it with the air-cond yeah?

MC1    :       Er… air-cond maybe in future… because my project is **just a simple project**.

PF       :        No, I think it is a project with very promising future… interesting.

PM      :        Yes, very interesting.

MC1    :       **Thank you &lt;smile&gt;… thank you, I very appreciate that**.

Example 2

PF       :       So, why do you ask for management trainee instead of a recruitment consultant?

MC1    :       Recruitment consultant? I apply for anything that can give me work, a job.

PF      :      <Laughing>So, if I ask you why did you apply for this job, it is solely because you're quite jobless right now, and you need a job?

MC1     :      Yes <smile>… I need a job… but now I'm here, I also think I will like the job you give me. I think I can do good job here.

Example 3

PM      :      <Laughing> Okay, at least you know your subject well, yeah.

MC1     :      Well… yes… I know my project well but because I study this very hard, **anyone who … er… study this very hard also can do well**.

What can clearly be observed above is MC1's modest attitude and sincerity when answering some of the panellists questions. He was not ashamed to admit that he needed the job but also showed a high level of humility by admitting that his final project for his thesis of which he had gotten an 'A' was just a small project that just about anyone could do it. MC1 also displays a keen interest to learn more if given the opportunity as seen below:

**Excerpt 8:**

PM      :      Do you have any exposure in robotics?

MC1     :      Robotic? No… no I don't have the chance yet.

PM      :      Do you have any interest in it?

MC1     :      Oh yes… yes, I have interest to do my further studies in robotic. Also if my job got to do with robotics, I think I can do it. I like it, so I know I can learn fast. **You don't worry sir**.

Another interesting factor that had set a very polite tone in MC1's speech is the fact that he used the reference term of 'sir' for PM and 'madam' for PF which denote high level of respect. Although, this is not required nor expected from the candidates, the reference term used by MC1 had certainly softened his manner of speech. Hence, although MC1 was clearly less competent in the English language as compared to MC5, he was able to obtain a higher average score for the interview evaluation due to two main contributing factors. The first being his background training, which is very relevant to job being advertised by the company and second, his display of positive attitude essential in a job training. Through his tone of speech as well as choice of words during the interview, he came across as being sincere, polite, pleasant and having the will to go the extra mile.

Contrarily, MC5 was not able to convince the panel of interviewers of his sense of worthiness during his interview sessions. In short, the maxim of quality in his discourse was questionable. He had difficulties in coming through to the panellists as being sincere and genuine. This was despite the fact that he was the most fluent male candidates who was able to express his ideas well with very minimal grammatical inaccuracies. Examples of his good command of the English language can be seen in the excerpts below:

**Excerpt 9:**

**Example 1**

MC5   :        ... well, the nature of business of the company is basically to deal withforeign exchange. So, in other words I need to make some form of calculation… like… making a forecast of the market to my customers… you know… look at market opportunity and provide information… yea.

PM    :        What type of information?

MC5   :        I try to teach them to (…) for them to enter the market, as you know foreign exchange and money market of such is (…) sort of like an

investment actually. So, yea… besides that my responsibility is to … provide this… er… information specially the fundamental view and the technical analysis as well.

**Example 2**

MC5    :    … I did apply several jobs, I was appointed as  (…), and apart form that, I joined several companies before. But, [anyway]

PM     :    Is there any particular reason that you just, what do you call… don't stay long at one company?

MC5    :    I just stated ## because I didn't stay long in others.

PF     :    Oh? You're not working anymore? Are you [still]

MC5    :    In ##, **yea** still working.

PF     :    Is it due to your interest ::: or?

MC2    :    **Yea**, due to my interest actually.

PF     :    Oh, now you want to change?

MC5    :    Yeah, **I wanna change**, because frankly speaking **I don't like the management actually.**

PF     :    Oh! Okay.

MC5    :    **You need to understand this**, basically your income is fully based on your commission. So, apart from that, **I don't like** the so called pyramid system of hierarchy.

Examples 1 & 2 above delineate the form of language use being employed by MC5. This includes what constitutes communicative competence as highlighted by Savignon (1983) which are grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence.

Observably, MC5's transcript indicates a smooth speech flow. This can be distinguished by his ability to put together string of sentences with minimal hesitation and sign of pauses,

most often indicating loss of words. However, what was not apparent in the transcript is the speed of his speech. This was only indicated in the researcher's note which remarked that MC5 speaks in a slow and unhurried manner, nevertheless very sure of himself. His speech also indicated his sociolinguistic ability. In this case, MC5 is perceived as having the ability to act in accordance to what is expected in a job interview. However, although he knew what to say and when to say it throughout the duration of his interview session, it is the element of 'appropriateness' when dealing with his choice of words that he was unable to fulfill Saville-Troike's (1982) concept of 'appropriateness' in situations which involve individuals of a higher or superior rank. This is especially apparent in his speech with the use of slangs like "yeah", "I wanna…", and "I'm gonna…" which the interviewers remarked on his evaluation sheet as sounding 'non-committal' and 'laid-back'.

In sum, albeit MC5's communicative competence he was not selected by the panel of interviewers to join the company. His level of confidence and assertiveness had inadvertently worked against him as well as Brovermann (1970) claims that assertiveness in men is acceptable as an expression of men's masculinity and self-confidence. In this case, although MC5 appeared to be confident during the interview session, panellists were not impressed by his negative sentiments as he clearly expressed when he said, "I don't like the management…", "I don't like the system" as observed in excerpt 9. Panellists also found his statement "You need to understand this…" addressed to them as discourteous.

MC5 competence in the language had also surpassed FC5's ability. Nevertheless, the panel of interviewers found FC5's personality more 'pleasant' and 'friendly' as remarked in her evaluation sheet. FC5 ranked third based on the evaluation scoring and although fared better than MC1 in the aspect of 'Expression of Ideas' indicating high level of discourse

competence, did not possess the more suitable training and background as MC1 has. As indicated in Table 4.30, MC1 scored a perfect '10' in aspects of 'Experience' and 'Education'. A Full mark for 'Experience' implies that MC1's background is well suited for the job and in the aspect of 'Education' it means that MC1 had met the educational requirements and has, in fact, additional qualifications.

## 4.5    Summary

The data analysis in this chapter was carried out with a clear intent on the part of the researcher to establish not only the gender communicative differences between the male and  female candidates in a job interview but also to ascertain if there was a clear relationship between their communicative differences and the result of the interview. The researcher also wishes to ascertain the speech style that was most favoured by the panel of interviewers. Essentially, the analysis was performed in three parts that reflect the researcher's intent.

Findings in Section 4.2 reveal the linguistic features that are found to be prominent in the series of interviews carried out in this study. Generally, it denotes the panellists calm manner in conducting the interviews as opposed to the repressive and aggressive form other panellists are sometimes known to be. This was seen as a motivating factor that had encouraged good responses from the candidates.

Findings in Section 4.1, nonetheless, have certainly revealed interesting outcome. Frequency counts on candidates' linguistic features reveal that there was indeed significant difference between the male and female communicative patterns. Female candidates were

found to have a higher number of words uttered and a lower number of turns taken during the interview. As the total interview duration for male and female candidates are similar, higher number of words uttered and lower turns taken indicate female candidates' ability to hold the floor longer when given to them.

Female candidates too were observed to have received higher positive minimal responses from both interviewers indicating high interest and attention to what was being said by them. The use of epistemic modals was significantly higher amongst the female candidates than that of their male counterpart. As the epistemic modal use in this study signifies higher level of competence in the English language, the female candidates are generally regarded as the more competent conversant as opposed to the male candidates in this job interview.

Having established that there are indeed differences in the communicative styles, in terms of linguistic features used, of both male and female candidates in the job interviews, the results obtained via the use of an evaluation sheet for each candidate were in favour of the female candidates. This further magnifies the more favoured communicative style amongst the female candidates and how it has provided an added edge to their personality and character. Nevertheless, training and experience too had a big role to play in a job interview. This was clearly proven by a male candidate, whom despite being overshadowed by the female candidates' performance in the interview had ultimately being selected by the company as he had the right type of background most suited for the job. Two candidates were successful in their quest to be hired. As expected, FC4 who had performed well consistently throughout her interview, was offered the job as well as MC1 who had the right background and training required by the company.

The most favoured communicative style, according to the panel of interviewers, was FC4's. She had the ability to draw the attention and interest of her interviewers, right at the moment she steps into the interview room. FC4's ability to hold the floor by holding the attention and interest of her interviewers was evident in the response she received by means of securing the highest number of positive minimal responses from them. Nevertheless, the panel of interviewer was also in favour of MC1's communicative style. Elements of politeness in MC1's were clearly taken positively by the panel of interviewers. This further confirms Martin (2004) who indicates that good 'soft skills' that ideally complement the 'hard skills' in an interview candidate would place him/her in a good stance for a successful interview as with the example being portrayed by MC1 and FC4.

# CHAPTER 5

## CONCLUSION

### 5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the overview of the present study. Summary of the findings are discussed and conclusions are made to highlight the significance and implication of the study.

The focal aim of this study is to identify linguistics features used during job interviews and analyse communication differences between female and male candidates in an employment interview. It sets out not only to identify the differences but also to draw a relationship between these differences and the outcome of the interview. Further to this, it also hopes to discover the most preferred communication styles between both genders in the interviews.

Subjects of this study are interview candidates who applied for two (2) positions being advertised by a management consulting company.. The interview sessions were conducted over the span of two days after which 4 candidates were further invited for a final interview session with the General Manager of the company. Direct observation was made possible in this study as the researcher was present in all the interview sessions. A triangulation method was used to examine the data collected for this study. Audio-recording of the interview was made and later transcribed for further analysis.

Data of this study was analyzed with an explicit intent to identify the differences in communication patterns of both female and male interview candidates. This is further explored by analyzing if such differences (if any) would have impacted the candidates' performance during the interview. Findings of this study have been intently discussed and highlighted in Chapter 4. These findings are now summarized to provide and overall perspective of this study.

## 5.1    Summary of Findings

The studies on language and gender have long been providing indicators of speech variations and diverse communicative patterns between genders. This study also hinges on such exploration with a setting that has become an essentially important element that contributes to the statistics of employment in Malaysia. As job interviews serve as a gateway to employment especially amongst graduates, findings in this study is highlighted with a clear intent to draw attention to the communication differences between genders and ascertain if there exist a relationship between these differences and the outcome of the interview. Findings of this study would also provide an indication as to the various communication styles and patterns that would take candidates a long way in an employment interview.

In examining the communication differences between both the female and male candidates in the interviews, specific focus was made on the main linguistic features used. A cross tabulation of the frequency counts of these features indicated that there was indeed differences in communication patterns between both genders. Although the differences

were not extremely prominent they nonetheless bear significant bearings in depicting a link or relationship with the candidates' performance during the interview.

**RQ 1:  What are the linguistic features employed by both candidates and panellists during job interviews?**

Findings in the previous chapter clearly show that there are distinct linguistic features that are commonly used by candidates in the interviews being carried out in this study. Candidates were observed to be more inclined to use modals like "maybe", "like" and "actually". The simplicity of such word choice reflected candidates' general competence in the target language. This is because a higher order use of epistemic modals like "probably", "you know" and "perhaps" were least used by candidates.

On the part of the panellists, it was observed that both panellists prefer the more supportive form of linguistic features. Both employed higher use of positive minimal responses and interruptions. This resulted in a more composed and less hostile atmosphere of the interview sessions.

**RQ 2: How do different genders employ the linguistic features during interviews?**

For the purpose of addressing this question, four main linguistic features used by both candidates were selected to be analyzed. These features include floor apportionment, minimal responses, epistemic modal and interruptions.

In relation to floor apportionment, although both male and female candidates were observed to have been given the same amount of time in terms of its total duration, findings

on the analysis made indicated that the female candidates have the ability to speak more and in longer duration as compared to their male counterpart. Female candidates in this study also demonstrated their ability to hold and retain the floor during the interview. This indication evidently differs from Tannen's (1990) standpoint that men talk more than women in group interactions.

Female candidates were observed to be using more epistemic modal speech as opposed to the male candidates. When used in the correct form and for the right function, epistemic modal is an indicator of excellent linguistic and communicative competence. Henceforth, what the female candidates have successfully demonstrate here is their competent communication skills and as well as their sociolinguistic competence. The same trend was also observed for epistemic modals made by both the panel of interviewers as well as the candidates. The female panelist was discovered to be using more minimal responses especially positive ones as compared to the male panellists. This significantly reflects differences in communication patterns between the panel of interviewers, whom in this case happens to represent both genders accordingly.

In terms of interruptions made by panel of interviewers, clearly there was apparent difference in the manner that both panellists handled interruptions when interviewing the candidates. The male panellist were seen to be less generous with his positive interruptions as compared to the female panellist who were observed to have taken up a more supportive role by making positive interruptions during the interviews. However, although both panellists favoured different form of interruptions (PM preference for negative interruptions; FI preference for positive interruptions), they had used both forms consistently between both female and male candidates. In other words, it was observed that

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there was no visible indication of gender bias that took place during the interviews between the interview panellists and the candidates. As both female and male candidates received equal number of negative and positive interruptions, it can be concluded that both female and male candidates in these interviews, in point of fact, had an equal chance of performing well in the interviews carried out.

**RQ 3:    How are these differences in the communication patterns of candidates related to the outcome of the interviews?**

Findings on analysis carried out for the above-mentioned research question (part II of the data analysis) indicate a clear and perceptible correlation between candidates' communication differences, in terms of patterns and style, and their overall marks obtained during the interviews. As these marks denote the candidates' performance, it is presumably justified to establish that gender communication differences as ascertained in part I of the data analysis of this study do, indeed, have significant bearings in affecting candidates' performance during the interview with marks awarded in favour of the female candidates. This further illustrates how the female types of communication patterns had worked well in favour of the female candidates.

**RQ4:    Which communicative styles and strategies are considered to be more preferable by interview panellists during an employment interview?**

Analysis on the discourse patterns of four (4) highly ranked candidates in the interviews conducted pointed out to favourable samples that denote high level of 'soft skills' being employed by the candidates. Among the four being regarded as potential employee by the panel of interviewers, it were indeed the communication styles of FC4 and MC 1 that attracted the interest of the interview panellists.

Both candidates (FC4 and MC1) displayed high level of courteousness and respect for the panel of interviewers. This has evidently worked in favour of them despite the fact that another candidate, MC4, was much more competent in the language used during the interview and demonstrated a higher degree of confidence. Unfortunately, MC4's level of confidence came through to the interviewers as being arrogant and over-rated. This is an apparent example how assertiveness amongst men had worked against the candidate. In relation to this case study, the perception of assertiveness in men as being acceptable as an expression of men's masculinity as suggested by Barone and Switzer (1995) does not necessarily apply.

The most favoured communicative style was that of FC4's who had successfully demonstrated that there are indeed other equally important elements that a candidate should display during employment interviews apart from scholastic achievement and communicative competence. This include the element of 'soft skills' or 'employability skills' that require candidates to have a deep sense of emotive control throughout the interview. Interestingly, although FC4 demonstrated a certain degree of assertiveness, this act was not taken as being rude or impolite. On the contrary, FC4's assertiveness was well perceived by the panellists. Essentially, she had demonstrated how assertiveness can be applied successfully when it is not overly done, as cautioned by King (1993).There is indeed a fine line between assertive and overly aggressive. Hence, in job interview situation as in this case study, Rakos' (1986) advice that "the best caveat regarding the appropriateness of assertion is to maintain awareness of the situation-specific learned skills needed to enhance one's adaptation to the environment" certainly applies not just for female candidates but for male candidates as well.

Another aspect of communication style that drew immense interest on the part of the panellistsis the element of politeness as demonstrated by FC4 and MC 1. Evidently, Holmes' (1991) suggestion that women interviewee were more often to found to be cooperative and polite, has been found to be true in this case study. Nevertheless, MC1's strategy of employing a high degree of politeness in his speech had given him an added advantage over the others. This further justifies the viewpoints of twelve (12) Malaysian recruiting personnel interviewed informally that polite behavior and speech demonstrated by candidates often take them a long way in the interview as they mark a certain degree of pleasantness and grace, archetypical of first-rated staff.

## 5.2    Limitations of the Study

The research carried out in this study was based on one particular case study in which all the interview candidates were predominately of the Malay ethnic group. Essentially, findings of this study do not represent the overall composition of Malaysian local graduates that are made up of various ethnic groups as well as background. The candidates of this study are inadvertently from one particular ethnic group. Having samples that reflect the actual multi-ethnic group in this country may produce a different set of findings.

The number of subjects in this study is also comparatively small.  There were only ten (10) candidates being interviewed and assessed.  Furthermore, a close examination of the communication styles employed in this case study were only made on three (3) candidates from the final four (4). This is due to the reason that one of the four (4) candidates did not display the attributes that were expected by the panellists in the final interview and whose competency in the English language was, by far, the weakest of the final candidates. Again,

a bigger sample would have provided a stronger impact as it would have increased the reliability of the findings in this study. From these ten candidates, only four were then shortlisted for the next level of interview and their discourse patterns were closely analyzed. Again, analyzing discourse patterns from a bigger sample would have provided bigger avenue for the researcher to work on.

Consequently, future research on similar topic should take into account the significance of providing bigger samples that would not only encompass a single ethnic group but a more diverse and multi-ethnic background of the candidates.

### 5.3    Concluding Remarks

In conclusion,  interview candidates especially young graduates should note and take into account Martin's (2004) assertion that good 'soft-skills' that ideally complement the 'hard skills' in an employment interview would position a candidate in a favourable spot. Interestingly though, findings of this study do not support the notion that female candidates do not perform as well as their male counterparts which was most often seen to have contributed to increased unemployment amongst female graduates in Malaysia. As evidently shown in this study, female candidates have been able to out-perform their male counterparts, be it in terms of floor control as well as the employment of 'soft skills' in convincing the panel of interviewers of their ability to better serve their future employers.

It is also worthy to note in this case study that female candidates, in general, demonstrated their ability to respond better to the interviewers' questions. Politeness, courteousness as well as gracious conduct are certainly regarded as winning traits of the successful

candidates in this study.  Although, many researches associate politeness with women specialty, it is interesting to observe that it can also be a winning trait amongst the men. Assertion on the part of female candidates is also seen as an indication of high confidence and self- assuredness. Hence, fresh graduates today must equip themselves with these tools, apart from their scholastic achievement, to ensure that they would have better possibilities of success in any employment interviews.