CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHOD

3.0 Introduction

This chapter gives an account of the background of the subjects and the instruments used for data collection. The procedures for data analysis are also discussed at the end of the chapter.

3.1 The Subjects

The research population comes from Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Taman Connaught where the researcher is currently teaching. The school is situated in Cheras, Kuala Lumpur. It was established 1990 and the present enrolment of students is about 2,400 students. It has two sessions. The morning session consists of Forms Three, Four and Five whereas the afternoon session comprises Remove Classes, and Forms One and Two. 90% of the school population is Chinese, out of which about 85% is Chinese educated. The high percentage of Chinese educated students is the special characteristic of the school. This has prompted the researcher to choose the school specially for the research. Moreover, as the researcher is teaching in the school, she has a better understanding of the background of the subjects. Another reason for the choice is convenience, as the subjects and the teachers involved in the interviews are easily available and it also saves time and cost of travelling when carrying out the research.
The research was conducted on 100 Form Four students aged between sixteen and seventeen. They were randomly picked from about 400 Chinese educated students. 25% is a representative sample. Form Four students were preferred as subjects for the research because they have acquired the basic skills of free writing and were able to write on their own without much guidance from the teachers. Besides, they have acquired a fairly large vocabulary at this stage which will enable them to express themselves fairly well. In addition, they did not have to take a public examination thus they were free to participate in the research.

The subjects had their primary education in the National Type Chinese Primary School where Chinese is the medium of instruction. They have studied Malay, the national language, from year one as a compulsory subject. They began to learn English in year three as a second language. After six years, they were transferred to the present school where Malay is the medium of instruction and English is taught as a second language, while Chinese has become an optional subject. All the subjects took Chinese in their Penilaian Menengah Rendah or PMR (Lower Secondary Assessment) and were studying the language in Form Four.

Most of the English teachers when interviewed commented that the subjects were very weak in writing compared to listening, speaking and reading. From the interviews, it was also acknowledged that the subjects communicated with their peers in Chinese. They only spoke English to the teachers during the English lesson when asking or answering questions. They hardly read English materials. Moreover, besides the writing tasks given by the teachers once a fortnight or once a month, the
subjects hardly did extra writing on their own. As a result, one can say that the subjects have limited exposure to English.

3.2 Instrumentation and Implementation

The instruments used for the research were the students' written work and interviews with teachers.

3.2.1 The Written Work

The research was based on free compositions written by the subjects. Written work was used because from the practical point of view, it is easier to make a systematic study of written materials compared to any other spoken materials (Corder, 1974). In written work, the subjects were also free to express themselves using the rules and vocabulary that they had acquired in the process of learning the TL. Written work is an effective method for evaluating students' language competence as acknowledged by Wee (1990), Tan (1994) and Cha (1996).

The written work consisted of two sections; each had two composition topics. The topics in the first section were narrative in nature and the topics in the second section were expository writing. These are given below:

Section one: Narrative composition

1. A person I admire
2. The day I will never forget
Section two: Expository composition

1. The benefits of reading

2. The advantages and disadvantages of watching television

The above composition types were chosen because the subjects have acquired the skills for narrative and expository writings, thus they will be able to write the compositions given. The topics were common to the subjects' experience and they did not require any knowledge of specialised vocabulary. This will enable the subjects to write with ease.

Every subject had to write two compositions, one from each section. They were given forty-five minutes to complete a composition. The average length of each composition was 150 words. The corpus is approximately 30,000 words which is a sufficiently large number for a variety of errors to be collected to provide material for a qualitative and quantitative analysis. The subjects wrote the compositions under the supervision of their English teachers in class. The students were informed of the purpose of the written work before writing so that they would not be subjected to any kind of test anxiety. They can express themselves freely and any mistake would not be caused by time pressure or test anxiety. In addition, they were not allowed to consult their teachers and friends or use a dictionary. This meant that the errors were genuinely theirs.
3.2.2 The Interview

A set of questions was prepared for the interview. The questions were designed to get information on the academic qualifications of the teachers, students' English competence, possible causes of lexical errors, vocabulary teaching in the classroom and suggestions for improving students' vocabulary.

The interview involved all nine teachers who taught English in the morning session. Seven of them have a degree in Bachelor of Education (TESL), one with Bachelor of Arts (English Literature) and another with Bachelor of Arts (Education). They have an average of ten years teaching experience and they have taught in the present school for an average of five years. The information given by them will therefore provide a source of information which would validate the findings as they are highly qualified, possess many years of teaching experience and know their students well.

The teachers were informed of the purpose of the interview and they were briefed prior to the interview. This was to ensure that the teachers will be well prepared for the interviews. The interviews took place either in the staff-room or library. The researcher asked all the questions and the answers were recorded in the question set. Each interview lasted between thirty minutes to one hour.
3.3 Data Analysis

A total of 200 compositions were collected for analysis. The analysis of data was based on Corder's (1981) three stages of error analysis: recognition, description and explanation of errors but with some modifications.

3.3.1 Recognition and Recording of Errors

In the study, lexical items used inappropriately in a particular context were considered as errors. For example:

1. Reading can explore our knowledge. (widen / increase)

2. He leads the country very good. (rules, well)

3. I never played with my cousin(s) because they always hit me unless my mother. (except)

4. En. Abu past away last year. (passed)

5. It was (Was it) my false or not? (fault)

In the above examples, the underlined words were either misused, distorted or confusing in the given context, thus making the sentences unintelligible and unacceptable especially to native speakers of English. These words were recorded as errors in the study.

The same word which is wrongly used in two or more sentences and whose correct answer is the same word is recorded as one error. When the reverse happens, it is counted as two or more (separate) errors. For example: In sentences 1 and 2 below,
the wrong word ‘influence’ was recorded as one error while in sentences 3, 4, and 5, the wrong word ‘education’ was recorded as three errors.

1. It (watching television) will influence our studies. (affect)
2. Watching television also influence our eyesight. (affects)
3. She did very well in her education. (examinations)
4. She went overseas for further education. (studies)
5. We can gain some education from educational programmes like National Geographic. (knowledge)

The researcher would like to note that most of the sentences written by the students were not grammatically correct and some sentences had more than one lexical error. The researcher had illustrated lexical errors in sentences that were grammatically correct or had the least grammatical errors. This study examined the lexical errors in the written work of the students. Other errors such as errors in grammar and punctuation were disregarded. In addition, errors that were regarded by the researcher as performance mistakes were excluded in the analysis because such errors do not reflect the learners’ TL competence and neither do they contribute to the learning process. For example: ‘I took my driving test⋯⋯⋯failed the slope text.’ The underlined word ‘text’ in the sentence was a performance mistake due to a slip of pen. The error ‘past’ in sentence 4 on page 44 was considered as a competence error by the researcher because it appeared twice in the same essay. Competence errors were analysed because they reflect the learner’s competence in his use and knowledge of the TL.
3.3.2 Classification of Errors

The second stage of analysis is classification of errors. The purpose of classification is to provide information on the types of errors made. The importance of classification is also emphasised by Ngara (1983:40) who states that "the end of all theory in the applied sciences lies in its application to practical problems in practical situation. It is therefore appropriate to make some observations on the significance of the types of errors identified." The errors were classified into two main categories and eleven subcategories. The classification of errors was a modified version adopted from Richards' (1971), Zughou's (1991), Tan's (1994) and Cha's (1996) classification taxonomies. They are illustrated below:

I. Interlingual errors
   1. Literal translation
   2. Use of Malay words

II. Intralingual errors
   1. Wrong choice of words or phrases
   2. Wrong use of derivatives
   3. Semantic similarity
   4. Graphic or phonetic similarity
   5. Tautology
   6. Overuse of superordinate terms
   7. Paraphrase
   8. Wrong choice of binary terms
   9. Wrong use of negative affixes
The number of errors and their frequency for every error type will be presented in the form of a table and chart from the most to the least frequently occurring errors. The hierarchical order gives the readers an easy and quick understanding of the types of lexical errors made.

In the data analysis, some problems in classification were encountered. Errors were classified according to their possible causes. Sometimes there may be more than one causes for an error. In order to avoid an overlap in some of the categories, the researcher will classify an error that has multiple causes into one category instead of several categories. For example: 'I tried to call back home'. The error in the sentence may be attributed to tautology as 'back' is redundant in the sentence or a literal translation from Chinese: 我尝试打电话回家。The researcher will classify the error in the literal translation category and not in both tautology and literal translation. The problem of assigning errors to categories arises due to a lack of precise criteria for classification and the possibility of multiple explanations. Ghadesy (1989) and Duskova (1969) have acknowledged this problem in their studies.

3.3.3 Description and Explanation of Errors

The last stage of data analysis is the description and explanation of the nature and causes of errors. Description of errors is a linguistic process. It is based on the comparison of the TL with the MT and Malay as well as comparison between lexical
items within the TL itself. Explanation of errors is a psycholinguistic process. It gives an account of how and why the errors occur. There may be several explanations for an error due to multiple causes.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the subjects, the implementation of the instruments used and how the data was analysed. The data analysis was based on various researchers' models of error analysis. Having described the methods that were used in this study, the researcher would like to move on to discuss the findings in the next chapter.