CHAPTER THREE
THE METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with the implementation of the steps undertaken by the researcher in this study. It describes the sample and their selection, data collection procedures and data analysis.

3.1 Subjects

The subjects of this study were selected from the Deaf Clubs of the YMCA Kuala Lumpur and the Perak Society of the Deaf in Ipoh.

3.1.1. Deaf Clubs

Deaf Clubs have been established in most states in Malaysia to enable the Deaf from all backgrounds and ages to network and learn various skills and at the same time to form a community to share their culture. The Clubs provide accessibility to information, employment, education, interpreting and many support services to assist the Deaf (Understanding Deaf Culture: Malaysian Perspectives, 2006:8).
(a) The YMCA Deaf Club of Kuala Lumpur

The YMCA Deaf Club of Kuala Lumpur was established in March 1973 with the main objectives of Fellowship, Social / Recreational activities and job placement. The YMCA became a meeting point for the Deaf not only from the Klang Valley but from other states as well. With the support of the YMCA Kuala Lumpur, the Deaf Club continues to conduct recreational programmes and workshops with the aim of helping the Deaf to be self-reliant and independent. Membership is open to those 19 years and above. Members pay an annual membership fee of RM 60.00. Members usually meet on Sundays between 3.00 p.m. and 5.00 p.m. for workshops; and between 5.00 p.m. and 7.00 p.m. for sports and recreation.

(b) The Perak Society of the Deaf, Ipoh

The Perak Society of the Deaf was formally registered on 11 January 2003. The Society provides an opportunity for Deaf members in Perak to congregate for social and recreational activities and to enable them to network.

3.1.2. The Deaf Participants

A sample comprising twenty Deaf members from the Deaf Club of YMCA in Brickfields and the Perak Society of the Deaf was selected. The sample consisted of ten males and ten females. Fourteen of them, that is seven
males and seven females were members of the Deaf Club in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur and six that is three males and three females were from the Perak Society of the Deaf in Ipoh.

Initial contact with the Deaf community was through an introduction to a member of the Perak Society of the Deaf in Ipoh. The geographical distance, as the researcher was working in Kuala Lumpur, posed a problem in coordinating the meeting of members in Ipoh on weekends and holidays. Thus only six respondents were selected from Ipoh. Furthermore there were members who were not selected because their SMS text messages were in Malay mainly because this study was undertaken for a dissertation for the MESL programme, Deaf individuals who sent SMS text messages completely in Malay were not considered.

As mentioned earlier the researcher lived and worked in Kuala Lumpur and so it was more feasible to continue the study in Kuala Lumpur. The Deaf Club established by the Pusat Majudiri Y of the YMCA in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, was more easily assessable. In addition, there were regular meetings with the members.

Two criteria were used in the selection of the respondents. As it is a study on SMS communication, only those who owned and used the mobile phone for SMS text messaging were selected as participants. The respondents selected were also profoundly deaf from birth or were prelingually deaf. Thus the data was collected from a homogeneous group of respondents who had no prior auditory language input and had similar language acquisition development. They were from the ages of 23 to 35 years. All of them had completed their secondary
education and were employed during the duration of this study. Three of them, two females and one male had university degrees.

The sample may be representative of Malaysian Deaf adults although it should be mentioned that the researcher does not assume that the sample is more widely representative in terms of educational, socio-economic and geographical backgrounds.

3.2 Research Methods

3.2.1 Discussions With Key Persons

Discussions were initially held with key informants and gate-keepers who were in a position to facilitate initial contact and also identify respondents for the research. They included Senior Executive, Manager, and staff of ‘Pusat Majudiri Y at the YMCA and Sign Language teachers. Their assistance was helpful in understanding Deaf culture and access to literature on Deafness and Deaf culture.

Initial introduction to the Deaf community was through Lucy Lim, the Assistant Manager and Sign Language Interpreter with Majudiri Y Foundation for the Deaf. She began as a volunteer at the YMCA Deaf Club in 1984. Ten years later in 1994 she went to Edmonton, Canada to further her studies to become a Sign Language Interpreter. Upon her return she continued her work with the Deaf at the YMCA, Kuala Lumpur and initiated many programmes to educate the public about Deaf culture. Due to her long association with the Deaf community and her position at the Pusat Majudiri Y, she was identified as the
most suitable gatekeeper to seek assistance. The other gate keeper who was interviewd is Ho Koon Wei, the programme coordinator with Pusat Majudiri Y. She is the list Deaf linguist, a graduate with a Masters degree fromm Gallaudet University.

According to Lucy Lim, the majority of the Deaf people are born into hearing families who do not use Sign Language. The Deaf may or may not learn a Sign Language during their childhood. However, most Deaf individuals consider Sign Language to be a crucial aspect of their identity as members of a Deaf community. In Malaysia, Bahasa Isyarat Malaysia (BIM) or the Malaysian Sign Language or is a distinct language from English and Malay involving a significant grammar and lexicon as reported by Ho Koon Wei (Deaf linguist from Gallaudet University) in her Masters Thesis. It is the preferred language of the Deaf community as it is as fast as spoken language and it conveys many nuances that are critical for communication. However BIM is not recognized as a language in Malaysia and the Bahasa Malaysia Kod Tangan, a form of cued speech, is used to teach children in schools. Thus most Deaf people are bilingual or trilingual. They use BIM and are literate in one or two written modes of the spoken languages namely English and Malay language.

According to both of them, the advent of the mobile phone has a tremendous impact on the way the Deaf community communicates. Previously communication could only be face-to-face or via e-mail. Today communication via the mobile phone is used on a daily basis by the Deaf community. The Pusat Majudiri Y too has adopted the mobile phone as a means of communication among the staff and with Deaf members and they use the mobile phone to send
SMS text messages. The Pusat Majudiri Y mobile phone number is for SMS only and voiced calls are not attended as members of the staff are Deaf. Similarly the business cards of the Deaf members include their mobile phone numbers. However it is stated that the mobile phone numbers are for ‘SMS only’. All SMS messages are promptly attended to as this is part of the phone etiquette.

3.2.2 Observations

Textual analysis alone without interaction by the researcher with the observed community is not enough to obtain a level of credibility of the findings. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) said, the ‘investment of sufficient time’ is necessary for observation, and to build trust and establish rapport with the members of the community. Goffman, E. (1989) suggests that the researcher becomes a ‘member’.

_The sights and sounds around you should get to be normal. You should be able to even play with the people, and make jokes back and forth._

(*p129*)

Thus the researcher had to effectively gain membership and learn the code from the inside by participation. A gradual means of entry was obtained through the development of contacts and with the building of trust with the group members. Thus the challenge was to find the means to overcome the barriers for effective entry into the group.

The researcher enrolled as a student at the Pusat Majudiri Y to learn Sign Language for a year. The researcher also became a member of the Friends of the
Deaf (FOD) Club at the YMCA Kuala Lumpur. As a member of the FOD, the researcher had the opportunity to attend workshops and seminars with the Deaf members and also participate in recreational activities like potluck, barbeques and attending birthday parties. The researcher also helped in the organization and volunteered at the Deaf Sports held at the YMCA field, the Deaf Festival at the International Medical University and the Mothers’ Day Celebration held in a hotel in Brickfields.

The researcher used the above to carry out field studies to gain a better understanding of Deaf mobile phone use. The Deaf people’s behaviors were documented – how they responded to SMS calls and how they handled their “conversations’ in public places like restaurants, stalls and commuter trains. As the researcher attended talks and seminars for the Deaf community, this also provided an opportunity to observe, covertly, their mobile phone use.

As a participant observer, the researcher gained a close and intimate familiarity with the given group of individuals and their practices through the intensive involvement with people in their natural environment. Thus the research was undertaken over an extended period of time of one year.

3.2.3 Discussion With Deaf Participants

This was followed by discussions with six of the respondents; three from the Deaf Club in Kuala Lumpur and three from Ipoh. Interviews served as an effective means of triangulation and effectively improved the credibility of the findings and the interpretations of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba,, 1989).
McDonough & McDonough, (1997:184) support the use of semi-structured interviews saying that ‘the interviewer remains in control of the direction of the interview.’ Thus the interviews were kept informal and the researcher, although in control of the interviews, allowed the topics of conversation to stray as this allowed for any new information unknown to the researcher to surface. The interviews focused on the perceived uses and benefits of SMS texting. Special attention was paid however to type and history of mobile phone use, text entry, text topics and with whom they communicated. The anecdotes, observations and comments provided by the interviewees gave the descriptive ‘data’ that had been obtained earlier. The respondents also gave feedback on the problems faced by them when sending and receiving text messages.

3.2.4 Questionnaire

Fifty questionnaires were distributed to members of the Deaf Club of YMCA Kuala Lumpur after one of the workshops. The questionnaire consisted of both open-ended and close-ended questions. The first 12 questions were to elicit information on personal and educational background. The remaining 20 questions were to find out information on their texting behaviour. Their knowledge of short forms commonly associated with SMS text messaging was also ascertained.

The information sought included educational background, working status, mobile usage and expenditure. The questionnaire sought to find out the history of the mobile phone use for SMS text messaging, the number of text
messages sent, to whom they communicate with and the reasons for communicating via SMS text messaging. The questionnaire was also used to find out how familiar the Deaf respondents were about the common abbreviations and clippings commonly used in SMS text messages. They were also asked to interpret 10 common short forms, acronyms and abbreviations that were randomly selected from Shortis’s typology. The basis for the selection was based on frequently used terms according to regular SMS text messaging users.

The researcher was on hand to assist and help clarify the questions. As it was after a workshop and some of the members had prior engagements; they requested that they complete the questionnaires at home and submit it to the Pusat Majudiri Y office the following week. However some did not return the questionnaires and there were others who did not answer everything. As such only 30 of the questionnaires were collated and used for this study.

3.2.5 Collecting of SMS Texts from the Deaf Participants

SMS text messages were collected from respondents in three different ways:

- Collecting and transcribing the SMS text messages during overt observations
- SMS text message communication recorded by the respondents in a journal entry
- Forwarded SMS text messages to the researcher’s mobile phone
Initially, the researcher spent about four hours with each respondent at a time to observe their use of the mobile phone for communication via SMS. The respondents then allowed the researcher to transcribe the SMS messages they had sent. The researcher had to transcribe the text messages exactly as it appeared on the display screen of the mobile phone. Given the tendency to use both intended and unintended abbreviations and spellings in the message, the transcribing process had to be very accurate - that is to transcribe accurately and exactly including all the variations and punctuations or lack of punctuations. Two assistants were recruited to check and verify the accuracy of the transcription.

There was an ethical and a methodological reason for asking for messages sent rather than for messages received. Ethically, it is not possible for the researcher to ask for messages a respondent had received since implicitly one includes data from persons who have not given consent to participate in the study. Methodologically, one does not know the background, demography or other characteristics of the sender of the messages that the respondent had received. Moreover the study is to investigate the language and communicative functions of the Deaf people. So, as mentioned earlier, there is no indication if the sender fits into the respondent’s category.

This method to observe the events as they occurred in their natural setting had its limitations. The presence of the researcher may have influenced the number of SMS texts messages sent. The respondent may have been of the opinion that he or she had to spend time with the researcher and this took away the need to communicate with other friends through SMS texting. The respondents only replied SMS messages that they received but did not initiate any SMS messages.
Also there was no way of ascertaining the content of the SMS messages sent when they went home. However it enabled the researcher to observe the mobile phone etiquette of the Deaf respondents.

The above was not an effective method of data collection as only one type of messages was generated i.e. replies. So the respondents were requested to transcribe the SMS text messages they sent and received exactly as it appeared on the screen. They were also asked to denote whether the receiver and sender of the message was a hearing person or a Deaf person. This method revealed some interesting insights into the use of SMS text messaging – which appeared almost conversational-like, as will be elaborated in Chapter Four.

The respondents were also requested to forward SMS text messages sent from their mobile phone to the researcher’s mobile phone. This was ideal as this would ensure the SMS texts were replicated without any omissions. However this was done voluntarily as it incurred a cost for the Deaf respondents. It meant that every SMS message would be double the cost as there was the cost of sending the message to the sender and also the cost of forwarding the same message to the researcher. Despite the inconvenience, 10 of the respondents forwarded their messages to the researcher.

In the course of the study, the researcher also established a close friendship with one of the Deaf respondents and this resulted in regular and frequent communication via SMS text messaging. With his consent the contents of SMS text messages were also used as part of the corpus.

3.3 The Corpus
A total of 540 separate authentic SMS text messages were obtained from the Deaf respondents. This also included SMS text messages received by the researcher through communication with the Deaf respondents. The SMS text messages were transcribed accurately into a single Microsoft word document. Not all the SMS text messages received were used. As mentioned earlier, SMS messages which were completely in Malay were disregarded.

3.4 Data Analysis

The information obtained from the discussions, observation, questionnaire survey and the textual data in the form of the SMS text messages will be analysed to answer the three research questions of the study. Information from the discussion, observations and questionnaire aided in answering research question one as well to help triangulate the findings. The textual data was used to answer research question two and three identify the communicative themes and orientations as well to give insights into the features of the SMS text messages of the Deaf participants. The research questions are as follows:

1. What is the SMS text messaging behaviour of the Deaf community selected?
2. What are the communicative themes and orientation of the SMS texts used by the Deaf community selected?
3. What are the features of the SMS text messages of the Deaf
3.4.1. Communicative Themes

Thr SMS text messages in the corpus were studied and analysed according to their communicative themes and orientations. The text messages were classified following Thurlow’s (2003:8) typology and assigned into the categories as follows:

- Family orientation messages
  - exchange and requests between family members
- Friendship orientation messages
  - ‘friendship work’ such as apologies, words of support and thanks
- Salutary orientation messages
  - specific and brief simple, friendly greetings
- Professional orientation messages
  - work and business related
- Social-arrangement orientation messages
  - arrangements for recreational plans
- Informational-practical orientation messages
  - exchange of practical details and requests for information
- Sexual/romantic orientation messages
– expressions of love, affection and explicit sexual overtones

- Chain messages messages
  - jokes, word-plays, epigrams

(Thurlow, 2003:8)

Language is always multifunctional and always dependent on context for its meaning. When the SMS text messages had more than one theme or orientation, the message was analysed to determine the main purpose or orientation of the text message to enable them to be assigned into the respective groups.

3.4.2. Features of the SMS Text Messages

The SMS text messages were analysed for the following features:

- Message length – number of words and characters used
- Main typographical and linguistic content – emoticons, abbreviations, letter homophones
- The influence of the features of Sign Language in the SMS text messages

3.5 Limitations in Methodology

At the initial stages of the study, the most prominent issue was the language barrier between the researcher and the Deaf respondents. The researcher did not know Sign Language and was only able to communicate through a sign
language interpreter or pen and paper. The language barrier as well as their ambiguity as to the purpose of the researcher’s presence posed a hindrance. Communication through a sign language interpreter was time consuming and not effective. The researcher felt she was speaking to the interpreter rather than the respondent, and also was not in control of the conversation. It was also laborious with the pen and paper method as the Deaf respondents stopped and said “I am tired of writing” and had no wish to proceed. This posed a big problem in getting information.

In addition, research in this field was made available only recently through the study by Power, M., (2004) in Australia. There was also a lack of current statistics and information about the Deaf community in Malaysia.

Despite the fact that SMS is extremely popular, it proved difficult to collect material. It might be the case that SMS was thought of as private messages sent between friends who know each other well. They communicated about things they did not want anyone else to read even though the content of the SMS messages were seemingly trivial. Thus there was some element of selective filtering of the content and messages as the respondents did not wish to show particularly private and revealing messages to the researcher.

Transcribing the SMS text messages had to be done as accurately as possible to retain the authenticity of the data. The SMS text messages that were forwarded to the researcher’s mobile phone were transferred to a Microsoft word document for tabulation and to enable the use the computer for the word count. When the messages were collected from the participants’ diaries, two assistants
were on hand to ensure they were transcribed exactly as they were composed. However there may have been an element of human error. In the case of the SMS text messages collected from the participants’ diaries, the researcher had less control in the manner in which it was transcribed. They were transcribed by the participants themselves. There may have been a tendency to correct the spelling and typo errors in their messages before public viewing.

The limitation in the methodology used in this study was the restrictions placed on the criteria for the selection of subjects. As selection was restricted to the profoundly deaf who had completed secondary education, it limited the application of the findings to a restricted homogenous section of the Deaf population and did not allow for broad generalizations to be made. However the restrictions were necessary to ensure the validity of a research such as this, to allow greater control over the results.