CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology of the study, including how data was collected, and how data was analyzed.

The aim of this study is to answer the general question of whether there are any quantitative or qualitative differences in the interactional discourse functions and the overall amount of talk generated by an information gap task.

3.1 Interactional Discourse Functions

Pica, Kanagy and Falodun's (1993) typology provides a starting point for the elaboration of a framework for this study. The varying functions of interactional discourse on the task will be analyzed. The researcher will be looking into the discourse patterns by selecting functions defined by Pica et al. These interactional features are defined as follows:

1. Backchannel cue:

> A response such as "Uh huh" made by one speaker during the other speakers' utterance. For example, a friend was talking to each other *"A man with glasses, he has a beard... "*, his friend responses " *Mmm....OK"*

2.   Clarification request:

Responses such as *"What?"* and the statement like *"I don't understand"* that elicit clarification of the preceding utterance.

3.   Comprehension check:

The speaker checks whether the preceding utterance has been

understood by the listener. They appear in the form of tag question,

repetitions and raising intonation, or by questions such as *"Do you*

understand?"

4.   Confirmation check:

The speaker would use repetition, with rising intonation, of all or

part of the speaker's preceding utterance, to confirm that the

utterance has been understood or heard correctly.

5.   Echo:

Repetition used with a flat intonation of the speaker's previous

utterance. What distinguishes echoes from confirmation-checks is

that in echoes there is no rising intonation. For example

A: Uh huh. And the woman is ugly

B: Ugly. How so?.

A: Uh...ugly like a witch!

B: Witch. Hmm... Uh... oh...like in Halloween.

6. Lexical-uncertainty:

A hesitant or tentative attempt to recall or correctly use a word. Often characterized by repetitive production of incomplete forms of a lexical item.

7. Paraphrase:

The speaker defines or paraphrases a word or phrase, either in response to, or in anticipation of, the listener's lack of comprehension.

8. Referential question:

The speaker requests information which is unknown to him, and which may be possessed by the listener.

9. Self repetition:

Partial or complete repetition of the speaker's own utterance, within five turns.

10. Sentence completion:

The listener finishes the speaker's utterance.

All exchanges will be video recorded and then transcribed. The samples which measure the amount of interaction generated by the dyads for information-gap task will then be analyzed. The ten exchanges were selected according to the pilot study done by the researcher. The researcher found from the observation that these exchanges appeared many times and gave ample opportunity for student communication and interaction.

3.2 Overall Amount of Talk

As discussed above, some of recent SLA research has focused on Interactional Discourse Functions. Of course, real-life exchanges do not always proceed through this sort of interaction function which is characteristic of L2 learners participating in an information-gap task.

The second question which most previous studies do not address pertains to length of turns. Therefore, the present study not only looks at ways in which NNSs signal difficulty in understanding and respond when asked by other NNSs to clarify or confirm what they have said in order to carry out a task (defined here as negotiated interaction). A greater overall amount of talk, in turn, allows for learners to engage in a greater and more complex language production in the L2, and the use of a wider range of syntactic and morphological constructions, as well as a more varied lexicon. Since the nature of the task is to encourage participation in taking turns, it is therefore sufficient. It is better for a student to speak than say nothing in

class, it does not matter for them if they say more or less, but encouraging them to speak out and be understood by others is the main purposes of communication.

The present study is a departure from previous task-related studies, which have involved a set of task-types. This study employs only an information gap task which has never been examined in previous investigations of task-related variability in the English classroom within Thai context. Another important reason for choosing only an information-gap task is that the researcher is confident that the subjects are familiar with the task. The researcher did an observation with the class before she decided to ask for permission to carry out the study. When we know that the subjects are mostly at the same proficiency level, they have the same amount of English learning experiences and they know how the task works, this would therefore validate the data. Also, by investigating this within the Thai classroom context, the research can then conclude whether an Information Gap Task is useful for an activity in an English classroom. So that people in the English language fields in Thailand realize that teaching and learning grammas or structures in classroom is not the only way to learn English.

3.3 Participants

This study was conducted at a language institution in Chiangmai, Thailand. The participants of this study are 20 university undergraduate students. The objective of this course was to enhance students' oral and aural skills by providing opportunities for them to participate in Speaking-Listening activities using English as

the target language. These students had studied for almost 90 hours in Conversation I class. Apart from the conversation course that they were studying, the students have studied English as a compulsory subject ranging from 12-16 years. They are categorized as pre-intermediate in terms of their English language proficiency.

The proficiency level of the subjects described was classified on the basis of the result of written, oral and aural tests which were administered by the Center before the student joined the course which was set on the June 2007. The main purpose for selecting subjects by language proficiency (test which was administrated by the Center) was to make sure that all learners are equally at the same level. The nature of the test was to evaluate the students' English language proficiency level. See Appendix 1 for the score each student got for the placement test.

The possible effect of learners' familiarity with each other was controlled by ensuring that the subjects in the study had been in class together since the last course. Moreover, the subjects had frequently participated in pair work in their classroom activities. To control for task familiarity, that is, to make sure that each student pair had previously participated in an information gap task, which was the focus of this study, the communication tasks were given as a classroom activity in the week prior to data collection.

3.3.1 Instruments

The instruments for collecting data are as follows:

1. Pairs task (an information-gap task)
2. Classroom observations by video recording

Most research to date has examined the use of tasks for learning English as a foreign language. Thus, studying L2 acquisition of a foreign language in Thai context need further investigation, especially for the Thai English Teacher for choosing communicative tasks for L2 instruction. For this purpose, the researcher developed the paired task (information-gap) for this study, because of the nature of this task, which was necessary to assign roles to each of the two interactants: speaker B asked student A to identify the right directions to tourist attractions.

3.3.2 An Information-Gap Task

Pica et al's typology of tasks was selected for this study. The first reason for selecting the task-typology is that the previous studies in the field of Task-based learning have only laid the groundwork for further investigation into the construct of related task. There are many communicative tasks which researchers could implement in class to create interaction. But the researcher has chosen an information-gap task to be the focus of the current study. There are number of researchers who support the effectiveness of the information-gap task.

The information-gap task which will be used for this study will focus on meaning, it is a communicative task in which interlocutors are expected to interact to complete the task and is characterized as being convergent i.e. participants will reach one outcome in completion (Duff, 1986).

In this study, the researcher has chosen instructions and directions (information-gap task) for the student to carry out. The subjects will count 1 and 2, the students who counted 1 will be paired with the previous student who counted 2, and this goes on until the last students are divided into pairs. This task was: Tourist Attractions, in which A was taking the role of a tourist officer and was asked to identify the directions to the right tourist attractions requested to him by the other interactant, who took the role as B, and for more details see lesson plan (Appendix 5).

To conclude, the goal was for the partner to identify the right tourist attractions on the map. The information-gap task differed from the other task in that only one interactant held the information and other requested it, which resulted in a one – way flow of the information.

This configuration of features corresponds to Pica et al's interactant-relationship 1b and interactant-requirement 2b as set out in Table 1 below. For this reason, an information-gap task can be seen as a relatively constrained task compared to other communicative tasks like problem - solving decision - making.

Table 1: Task Relationships: Requirements, Goals and Outcomes (Pica, Kanagy and Falodun, 1993)

Task Relationships, Requirements, Goals & Outcomes.	
1) Interactant Relationship	a) Each interactant holds a different portion of the information and supplies and requests it.
	b) One interactant holds all information and supplies it as the other requests it.
	c) Each interactant has access to information and supplies it if the other requests it.
2) Interaction Requirement	a) Each interactant is required to request and supply information.
	b) One interactant is expected to request the information the other is required to supply it.
	c) Each interactant is expected to request and supply information but not required to do so.
3) Goal Orientation	a) Interactants have same or convergent goals.
	b) Interactants have related, but divergent goals.
4) Outcome Options	a) Only one acceptable outcome is possible.
	b) More than one outcome is possible.

3.3.3 Video Recording

Classroom observation was employed before the time of the study so that the students could become familiar with the video camera being in the room. This helped students overcome their shyness and thus demonstrate their real ability. The video recording set for every student-pair was transcribed and coded by the researcher and two appointed teachers.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

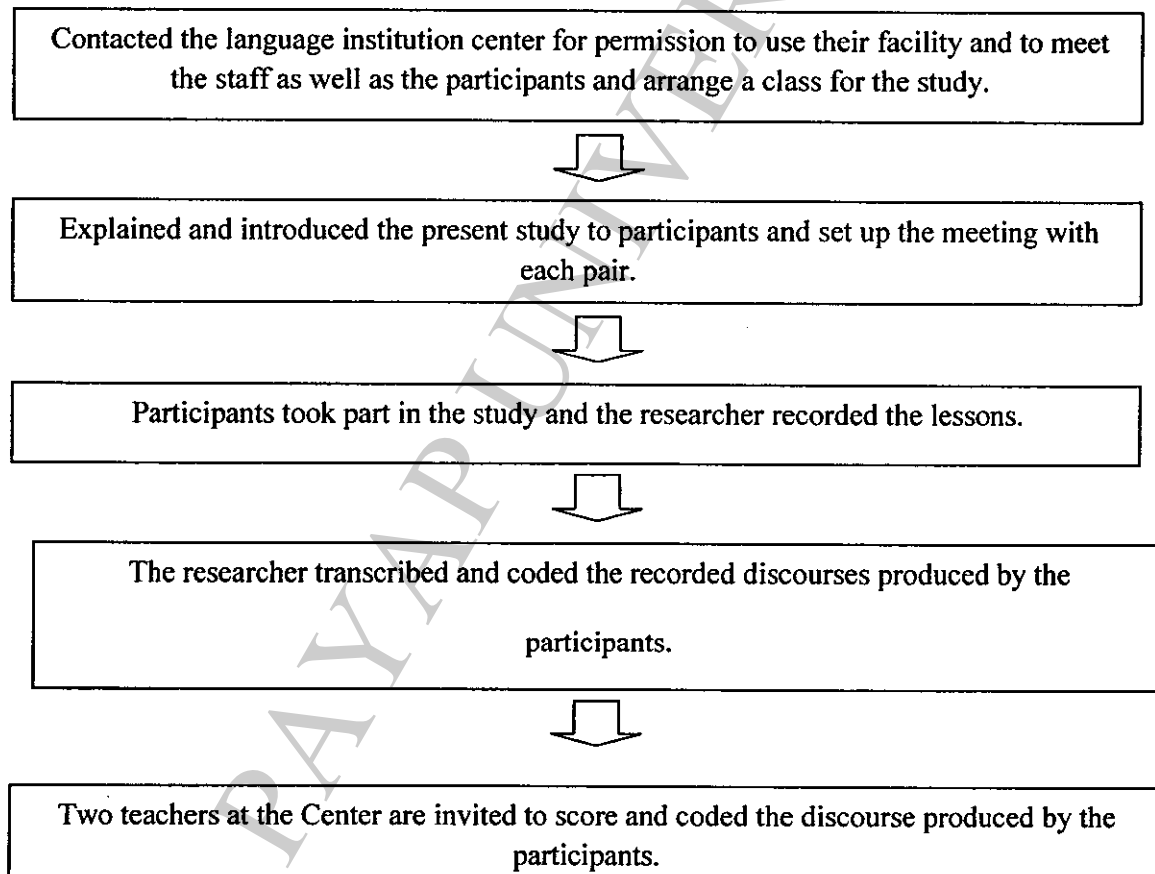The procedure of data collection is presented in the following flow chart.

Contacted the language institution center for permission to use their facility and to meet the staff as well as the participants and arrange a class for the study.

⬇

Explained and introduced the present study to participants and set up the meeting with each pair.

⬇

Participants took part in the study and the researcher recorded the lessons.

⬇

The researcher transcribed and coded the recorded discourses produced by the participants.

⬇

Two teachers at the Center are invited to score and coded the discourse produced by the participants.

Figure 2: Overview of data collection procedure

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3.4.1 Data collection

The researcher and two appointed teachers participated in the data collection procedures. Following an initial meeting to set up and explain the study, student pairs were withdrawn from class once only to do the task. With seven weeks of classes on every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, this meant that 3 student-pairs per week. A written instruction of the task was given to each subject, as well as an oral explanation of the procedures (see, Appendix 5). While completing the task the researcher recorded the lesson and sat in the classroom on all occasions, so that the data was collected as unobtrusively as possible. Each pairs was given five minutes of preparation time prior to the task and up to thirty minutes would be allocated for task completion. The total recorded discourse by all subjects was transcribed and coded.

Consequently, to insure validity of comparisons, data was collected through the same procedure for every pair. In addition, in order to minimize the intrusion, the researcher decided to set up the video in the subject's normal class before the actual time the study started, so that the subjects would feel more comfortable and relaxed during the real recording.

3.4.2 Validity of the transcription

Duranti (1997) stated that transcripts are inherently incomplete and should be continuously revised to display features of an interaction that has been analyzed and allow for new insights that might lead to new theories. After the researcher has listened to the video recording several times, there were some changes in the transcripts. In the end, the researcher listened to the excerpt 40 times.

Two teachers were invited to participate in analyzing these spoken discourses and they took part in the scoring process. The researcher met and explained the present study to the teachers, they both understood what they should do to transcribe and code the language produced by the students. After a number of discussions and over some disagreement, the two teachers as well as the researcher came to the same conclusion. The agreement criteria defined by Pica were used and they finalized the results together. The marking results of the teachers and the researcher showed 91% agreement. Therefore the transcription is valid as well as reliable in the sense that the researcher as well as the teachers understood the student's language (see Appendix 4, student-pairs 3) and came up with the same coding of the IDF produced by the subjects.

3.4.3 Coding and Data Analysis

To conclude, the discourses from an information gap task will be transcribed following audio/video recording. The first ten functions measured the amount of interactional features generated: (1) backchannel-cues, (2) clarification-requests, (3) comprehension-checks, (4) confirmation-checks, (5) echoes, (6) lexical-uncertainties, (7) paraphrases, (8) referential-questions, (9) self-repetitions, and (10) sentence-completions. Three further variables measured the amount of talk generated: (11) number of turns, (12) number of words, and finally (13) number of words-per-turn. Frequencies for the following ten interactional functions (defined as the verbal behaviors interlocutors used to signal either understanding or misunderstanding) were calculated by using a simple percentage. For the purpose of quantifying the variable of words, all words were counted except for Thai translations.