UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MARA

CONVERSATIONAL LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SPOKEN DISCOURSE IN ESL PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

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of the requirements for the degree of
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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of Universiti Teknologi MARA. It is original and is the results of my own work, unless otherwise indicated or acknowledged as referenced work. This thesis has not been submitted to any other academic institution or non-academic institution for any degree or qualification.

I, hereby, acknowledge that I have been supplied with the Academic Rules and Regulations for Post Graduate, Universiti Teknologi MARA, regulating the conduct of my study and research.

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ABSTRACT

At the university level, various job interview training have been carried out to prepare future graduates for employment. However, the graduates' poor communication skills remain as one of the reasons for unemployment in Malaysia. Since job interviews are placed heavily on verbal exchanges between the interviewer and job candidate, the role that language plays in interaction is worth exploring. This study investigates the use of spoken metadiscourse in the Malaysian ESL job interviews to identify the types and frequencies of spoken metadiscourse employed; to examine the similarities and differences of metadiscourse across disciplines; and to explore how the metadiscourse features function in the said context. The data come from sixteen actual first-stage job interviews, whereby ten job interviews are from the technical discipline (i.e. science-based profession) for the post of Plant Operation Engineer in a multinational company based in Malaysia; and six non-technical job interviews (i.e. social science and humanities job) for the post of English language lecturers in a public university in Malaysia. Corpus Linguistics and Corpus Analysis (CL/CA) methods were employed to analyse the textual and interpersonal metadiscourse in the corpus, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative findings revealed that the textual and interpersonal metadiscourse were used in the Malaysian ESL job interviews, but there were variations in the distribution and composition of metadiscourse in the two categories across disciplines. A notable finding was that the more detailed categories in the tentative metadiscourse framework proposed in the present study did prove useful in identifying similarities and differences in the use of metadiscourse across disciplines, and in explicating the metadiscourse subtypes which reflect power differences in job interview discourse. The qualitative analyses of metadiscourse which employed the CL/CA methods have revealed the specific functions and types of metadiscourse items occurring in the specific context throughout the job interview. CL/CA methods were found effective in investigating the use of metadiscourse in the Malaysian ESL job interviews. The study suggests that students at the tertiary level may benefit from explicit teaching of metadiscourse to enhance their communication skills. Training in the verbal aspects, specifically on metadiscourse in job interviews can be enhanced when learners are given the opportunity to reflect on their speech productions, so that they are better trained to gain control over their own language performance.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher's motivation in studying the linguistic aspect of job interviews is discussed, considering that job interviews require advance linguistic means to make a good impression. The statement of the problem is then explained. After providing the purpose of the present study to be conducted, the research objectives and research questions which guided and motivated this scholarly inquiry are presented. This is followed by an explanation on the significance of the study. Important terms used in this study are also defined.

1.2   Background to the Study

Malaysia aspires to be a high-income nation by the year 2020. To achieve this vision, there is a need to boost and enhance the skills and capacity of the nation's human capital. Realizing the significance of human capital development, the Malaysian government has initiated various programmes and development to improve the employability of the fresh graduates, such as the 1Malaysia Training Scheme (SL1M), a talent development programme in collaboration with industries, which is meant for graduates who are unable to secure jobs after six months following their graduation. However, unemployability among graduates remains to be a national issue.

From a considerable amount of research, it was found that there is a mismatch between employers' requirements of entry-level employees and the actual skills of the graduates (Bank Negara Malaysia, 2016). This also means that a lot is expected of the higher education system to improve graduate employability. According to a report by Pillai, Khan, Ida, and Raphael (2012), more training on the communication skills in English language were needed for university students. This report was being based on self-evaluation surveys distributed to public university students and their employers while they undergo industrial training, which suggested that more training was needed with regards to the future graduate's communication skills, an area that has been identified as being a major setback to the Malaysian graduates' employment.