Chapter 7:
Methodology: Going Beyond a Lexico-grammatical Analysis

In the previous chapters the findings of an analysis of thematic choices in the memos, letters and reports are discussed. The present chapter reports on a small scale study which complements the analysis of the choice of Theme, through an exploration of informants' responses to the text, rather than the researcher's interpretation. The adoption of multiple methods and perspectives is well recognised in the social sciences, and it is believed to contribute to the validity of the present study. The constructivists' notion of validity is that

> Validity is seen as the correspondence between the researcher's "account" of some phenomena and their "reality" (which may be the participant's construction of the phenomena). Internal and external validity are replaced by descriptive, interpretative, theoretical, generalizable, and evaluative validity.

<div align="right">(Lynch, 1996:55)</div>

This view led to a second data collection procedure which incorporated informant interpretations. This second set of data was intended to validate and triangulate the findings of the lexico-grammatical analysis. The benefits of assessing research from multiple perspectives and through the procedures adopted in the informant data collection are presented below.

The impetus for this study derived from the classroom. In the context of an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom, where the researcher was involved in teaching accountants, as part of piloting the material developed in CPW Phase II, the researcher was using as exemplars authentic texts (both 'good' and 'bad'). The ELT (English Language Teaching) materials had been specifically written for accountants as part of the CPW project Phase II (Aldred and Offard-Gray, 1998). As the students worked in discussion groups it became clear that their interpretations often diverged substantially from the researcher's and from those of the material writers. It seemed that informants, who were familiar with such texts in their professional lives, could be given a voice and that their voices should be reported and compared with the voices of EFL teachers, who are involved in developing and using pedagogic material. The aim was to collect a second set of data of 'informant' views of certain texts.

In what follows, the methodology adopted in the collection of informant interpretations is outlined. The justification for including informant interpretations is set out in Section 7.1. The data and the informants' background are outlined in Section 7.2. The procedure

adopted in collecting informant interpretations in focus group interviews is provided in Section 7.3. Concluding remarks for the present chapter are presented in Section 7.4.

7.1   Why informant interpretations?

'Going beyond' the text and collaborating with informants who are users of the texts being studied has become a recognised research tool within the field of applied linguistics (Poynton, 1993). However, there is little published work outlining methodological considerations in conducting such research. In order to understand the way in which informant views extend and enrich this research, this section raises key points concerning the potential of using specialist informants.

Poynton (1993) argues that SFL needs to develop beyond being a purely lexico-grammatical analytical framework by incorporating practices other than just text analysis, such as reader interpretation, into the research. She advocates finding new methods to represent the analysis and language of texts. In addition, Poynton stresses that there is a need to supplement grammatical analysis with social theory. Bee-Leng (1992) in his study of organisation behaviour also stresses the need to discuss more than just the language when analysing communication. He believes that 'cultural factors' need to be considered in any discussion of communication. Although cultural factors are important, an in-depth consideration of them was not possible in the present study. However, the study does attempt to analyse more than just the grammar through a consideration of the way in which a writer's viewpoint within an organisational setting is part of any text produced or read.

In the present study, informant views about language were collected from two quite different groups by eliciting reactions to and interpretations of the texts. In parallel with the collection of informant responses a generic and lexico-grammatical analysis of two memos was carried out. As suggested by Poynton, the inclusion of informant interpretations of a text incorporates "personality into its grammar" (Poynton, 1993:8). The aim is to triangulate the texts, textual analyses and informant interpretations to establish what 'thematic' meanings are key features in the construal of the text, and the way in which these meanings are realised through language choices.

Stressing the need to look outside the text and suggesting that the researcher should elicit information from specialist informants is a theme shared by a number of researchers, among them Swales (1990), Bhatia (1993a), Gibson (1993), Poynton (1993), Stainton (1993), Berry (1995, 1996), Davies et al. (1999) and Louhiala-Salminen (2002). Such a

need to consult with specialist informants arises in applied linguistic for various reasons, for example:

1) The analyst may be working with content related to another discipline, which may be outside the researcher's knowledge; if this is so, then certain general linguistic and specific discourse features in the text may require clarification or explanation.

2) There is a need to verify findings, i.e. the "need to know whether other readers perceive the same amounts, degrees, and types" of meaning that the researcher does (Berry, 1996:15). It is not enough to rely on the intuition of an individual interpreter; verification and validation need to be sought.

3) It would be useful to discover the meanings intended by the writer, and how real readers of the text actually interpreted those meanings. Thus, by discussing a text with informants who write, receive or use similar text, an interpretation related to the context of the text may be revealed. It should be noted that although all informants are from the workplace, their workplaces are different and may have different 'house styles' and corporate cultural norms. However, all informants indicated that they were familiar with such texts in the context of their own environment.

4) Gaining insights into a text from real users of such texts enhances the relevance of any findings made by the analyst. Stainton (1993) stresses that it is only by gaining insights from "users of a text that a position can be reached where the findings from such an investigation will be relevant and applicable to a real context" (Stainton, 1993:9). Their relevance is enhanced in that the results reflect the texts' context of situation in a truer light; in addition the terms used to discuss texts will constitute a "working vocabulary of the community in question" (Stainton, 1993:9).

5) By involving users of texts, or similar texts, in some way a research 'relationship', however limited, is developed and the outcome will inevitably be more relevant. The relevance gained by incorporating informants' interpretations will be useful for the researcher, for the field of applied linguistics, for pedagogy, and for the members of the workplace. If the outcomes are a true reflection of the context and the meanings made in the context, then this will benefit all. For example, if the aim is pedagogic, the potential students or some of their colleagues would have been involved from the beginning, and would have a voice in the interpretation of meaning, and the development of pedagogic outcomes. Thus, the effectiveness and appropriateness of the outcomes both from a pedagogic and research perspective will be enhanced.

For the purpose of this study, the business and teacher informants constituting the two 'groups' were considered key stakeholders (the details of the two groups are presented in detail below in Sections 7.2.1 to 7.2.3). Both groups use such texts in their daily work. For the purposes of comparison, it would have been ideal to have worked with two groups of the same size. Unfortunately this was not achievable, and thus quantitative comparisons are not possible. It does, however, provide the opportunity for individuals from both the workplace and the classroom to express their views. The composition of the groups is described in more detail below.

7.2   Informant interviews

As pointed out by Plum and Candlin (2002), a key feature of attending to the voices of participants involved in focus group interviews is "the degree of diversity between individuals on some issues and unanimity across entire groups" on other issues (Plum and Candlin, 2002:240). Ensuring that the appropriate procedures are adopted so that all individual voices in a group can be heard is a difficult task. Choosing and applying the appropriate methodology is essential for success. In the present study, the interviews followed a semi-structured model and the reasons for selecting this model are discussed below. Creswell suggests four considerations when collecting informant interview data: the actors, the setting, the events and the process (Creswell, 1994:148). These four issues will be discussed in detail below.

7.2.1   Participants: the informant sample

The actors in the present study were 'purposefully' selected; two groups of informants were approached: business and EFL teacher informants. The term 'informant' as used within linguistic literature refers to a practising member of the discourse community (in this case the members of the workplace and the teaching profession where such texts are used). The informant provides the researcher with insight into the routine language used within the workplace. Without an informant's assistance, the view of language could be distorted by the researcher (Bhatia, 1993a:34).

  The informants participated in a discussion about their interpretations of two memos and the way in which the given texts construe meaning. Due to the limitation of space and time it was not possible to carry out such informant interviews for all three text types. There is unavoidably a sample bias by including only memos. However, the memos were purpose-fully selected to illustrate and elicit opinions about Theme and interpersonal meaning which could be relevant for written texts in the workplace in general, as the issues discussed in the informant interviews related to the choice of Subject/Theme, Modal Adjuncts, imperatives and depersonalisation are concerns which have surfaced throughout the analysis of all three text types. All informants used workplace texts such as those selected on a daily basis. However, it should be noted that the underlying purpose of use for the two groups is very different: the teachers use them as teaching tool and the business people use them as a typical means of communication in order to get work done.

  The teachers, who were all teaching full-time at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, were formally involved in using letters, memos and reports as part of their classroom

teaching. They were all employed full-time in Hong Kong. The details for both groups are presented in what follows.

7.2.2 The business informants

For the purpose of these interviews, a sample of business informants was selected who were representative of workplaces in Hong Kong. They came from a variety of different organisations. There were nine middle managers and three junior managers, according to the informants' description of their role within their organisations. When asked their job titles, these included: librarian, business unit manager, associate license operation administrator, assistant manager – retail sales, deputy manager, executive officer, executive, teacher, nurse, admin and human resource manager.

   Only one of the informants worked in a small organisation of fewer than 50 employees; three worked in organisations which employed 51-100 employees, four in organisations with 101-500 employees and another four in organisations with more than 500 employees. Four of the informants worked in domestic organisations and the other eight in international organisations. Cantonese was the first language of all of the informants and all had at least a Bachelor's degree.

7.2.3 The teacher informants

For the teacher group a sample was selected that incorporated individuals with different teaching experiences and cultural backgrounds. One group was comprised of native English speakers, another group was all non-native English speakers, and two groups were a mix of native and non-native English speakers: Four were native speakers of Cantonese, three of Putonghua, seven of English and one of Hindi. From the researcher's perspective, and also indicated by the fact that they were employed full-time as EFL professionals, all teacher informants appeared fluently bilingual, and all had been working as EFL professionals for at least seven years. Indeed, six informants had been in the EFL profession for between 10 and 16 years and seven had been in the field for more than 18 years. The group had an average of more than 16 years of professional involvement in EFL, and thus a great deal of experience upon which to draw when discussing texts which were similar to those used in their classrooms. One of the reasons for including a wide range of informants from different backgrounds was to ensure that individual voices would be heard and that the interpretations of the texts would be heteroglossic. In this way, cultural interpretations relevant to the teaching environment of Hong Kong would be

embraced. English language teachers in Hong Kong come from a range of backgrounds; there are many British, American, Australian, Hong Kong Chinese, and Mainland Chinese teachers, as well as teachers from other countries.

7.2.4 The texts used in the informant interviews

As recommended by Perrett (2000), when using texts as a means for conducting analysis it is important to "plan" which texts will be used and compared. The two memos were purposefully selected as data to be used and inherent bias at this stage in the choice of the data used is a positive feature. Following Creswell's (1994) suggestions, the qualitative approach taken in this part of the study involved setting the boundaries and the researcher was involved in making a number of decisions which would influence the data collected. The boundaries guiding the selection of the texts for the study were based on the wish to validate and investigate further issues raised by the previous findings. As the focus of the study was Theme and interpersonal meaning, Memos 13 and 13A seemed appropriate texts which would elicit views about these two features. The texts had almost identical ideational content; however, their textual and interpersonal realisations were very different. The bias in the selection of two specific texts could then be used to explore features related to language and the meaning construed through the textual and interpersonal realisations. The texts were short, and general in nature; thus they would not overwhelm or confuse the informants. All informants volunteered to participate and the time constraints of such busy people were taken into consideration. Each group interview lasted a maximum of 40 minutes.

The data used in the interviews were: Memo 13, which is an authentic text from the CPW corpus, and Memo 13A, which is a memo taken from a pedagogic textbook (Aldred & Offard-Gray, 1998:41). Memo 13 was written by a Cantonese speaker based in a large public auditing firm. This memo was chosen as it incorporated interesting Theme choices which would possibly evoke interpersonal meanings for the reader. Memo 13 provided the material writers in Phase II of the CPW project with the basis for the construction of a 'better' example. Memo 13A is believed by the material writers to be a better model than Memo 13 (Aldred and Offard-Gray, 1998). These two texts were to be used as models to introduce to the students interpersonal features found in workplace texts (Aldred & Offard-Gray, 1998:41). Memo 13 was collected in Phase I of the CPW project and was included as part of the data for the present study. All findings reported in Nunan et al., (1996) and the data collected during the CPW project, were available to the research team of CPW

Phase II, and hence Memo 13 appears in the present corpus and also in the ELT accounting textbook.

The two memos, almost identical in their field, are both concerned with the correct procedure for the submission of time sheets. However, they vary considerably in the linguistic devices they employ to present the ideational content. The difference in linguistic choices and the way in which they affected the informant interpretations of the texts were explored during the informant interviews.

Text 7.1, Memo 13

Date: 11/14/96
To: All Staff
CC: Mr Chui
From: Emily Leung
RE: Time Sheets
I have spent a lot of time on time sheets because you have not properly filled them in and in some cases none were submitted by the due date.

You should not delegate responsibility of your timesheet to somebody else. If you are expected to be on leave on the due date, you should prepare one before you go on leave. If you are at the client and are not able to submit one by hand, you should fax the completed time sheet to the office no later than 1:00 pm on the due date. All time sheets should be submitted or faxed to the attention of Amy. Please note that she is not responsible for filling in time sheets over the phone and she has been instructed not to do this in future. Time sheets should contain complete information especially engagement codes. All columns and rows should be cast downward and across. It should also be signed on completion. The due date for submission is 5:30 pm on the 15th or 30th/31st of each month.

For those reviewers who are using Cabs pro, you are expected to ensure that your time sheets are correct and complete. A copy of the unconfirmed time sheet should be submitted in accordance with the above. On the next working day after the due date, you are expected to transfer the time sheet yourself or at least make available your computer in order that your time sheet can be confirmed and transferred to the system. Please ensure that Amy has your password if you are not in the office.

I would expect members of the department to fully comply with the above procedures especially for those who have been with the firm for over one year. Any incorrect or incomplete time sheets will require more of my time and your inefficiency within the department will be noted. A record will also be kept in future in order to assess your efficiency in this respect and will be discussed as part of the staff appraisal meeting

I sincerely hope that I will not have to repeat the above to you again during the busy season (January to March).
[signature]

Aldred and Offard-Gray (1998) did include a version of Memo 13 in their material but it was included as part of a cloze exercise, i.e. Memo 13 had text missing from clauses and the students had to find the appropriate verb to make the clause complete.

For the purpose of the present study, the fact that the texts were complementary, Memo 13A being based on Memo 13, was extremely fortuitous in aiding the investigation into textual and interpersonal meanings. Aldred and Offard-Gray (1998) reworded and restructured memo 13 to make the memo, according to their interpretation, appear more 'business-like'. In the redraft, i.e. in Memo 13A, the ideational content remained stable but the textual and interpersonal choices were altered. Thus, it was envisaged that informant interpretations would reveal preferences and insights into different linguistic choices related to both the textual and interpersonal characteristics of the texts.

Text 7.2, Memo 13A

Date: 11/14/96
To: All Staff
CC: Mr Chui
From: Emily Leung
RE: Time Sheets
I would like to draw attention to the correct procedure for submitting time sheets and remind staff of the importance of submitting them by the due date.
Please note the following:
  (i)   The due date for submission is 15th or 30/31st of the month by 5:30 p.m.
  (ii)   Engagement codes must be included on time sheets.
  (iii) All columns and rows should be cast downwards and across.
  (iv)   Anyone who is visiting a client must fax completed [sic] time sheet by 1.00 p.m.
Anyone who is going to be on leave, should submit before he/she goes on leave.
Reviewers using Cab Pro must:
  -    send <u>unconfirmed</u> copy of time sheet as above
  -    ensure that time sheet is confirmed and transferred to the system on the next working day after due date
  -    ensure that Amy has your password If you are not in the office to enable transfer
All staff are expected to comply with the above in order to improve efficiency. Efficiency will be improved if the above procedure is followed. I would remind staff that inefficiency in this respect will be noted and discussed as part of the staff appraisal meeting.
Finally, please note that Amy has been instructed not to fill in time sheets over the phone as this is not her responsibility.
I trust that I will not have to remind staff of the above points again during the busy season.

(Aldred & Offard-Gray, 1998:44)

Informant interpretations of the language and meaning constructed by the different choices made in Memo 13 and 13A are discussed in Chapter Eight.

7.2.5   The informant interviews

Focus group interviews were carried out with informants who were asked to reflect on the texts and the language used in two sample memos. This approach, according to Plum and Candlin (2002:238) who conducted similar focus group interviews with psychology students in relation to writing and literacy practices, is "primarily *interpretative* and ethnographic" (italics in orig.). It is interpretative, as in fact all research is. Sturman (1999) states that:

> personal judgement forms an essential part of all science and is neither objective or subjective … that assertion, whether it emerges from ethnographic or multivariate statistical modeling, rests on personal judgement which includes an appraisal of evidence with the tenets of acceptable practice as perceived by the research community…
>
> (Sturman, 1999:109)

Plum and Candlin's study and the present study are both 'interpretative'. The ethnographic description of the research is based on the fact that focus groups allow the researcher to describe "events that occur within the life of the group" and they allow the researcher to analyse and understand "the behaviour of individuals with respect to their group membership, and an interpretation of the meaning of these for the culture of the group" (Taft, 1999:113). However, Creswell (1994) and others would argue that in order to be truly ethnographic the "researcher studies intact a cultural group in a natural setting during a prolonged period of time" (Creswell, 1994:12).

The present study is undoubtedly interpretative, as previously suggested in Chapter Four. However, there is no assertion that the present study is ethnographic. The data from informant interviews provide an insight into the way meaning is made through linguistic choices in workplace texts. Such data are by no means experimental and the reporting of the focus interviews offers the researcher insight into the nature and motivation of certain linguistic features found in the text and in the practices of workplace discourse.

Little guidance related to conducting informant interviews is available from an applied linguistic perspective in the literature. Berry (1996) summarises her findings but does not fully explicate her procedure. Bhatia (1993a) lists informant collaboration as one of the seven important steps when analysing a genre, but goes no further. Gibson (1993) gives a

thorough description of the feedback from informant groups and a breakdown of the background information of his informants, but does not explicitly discuss the methodological considerations. Perhaps this raises issues concerning some of the limitations of the methodological approaches adopted by applied linguistics in this particular field.

Other areas of research methodology offer insights into the procedures related to focus interviews. Cohen and Manion (1994) state that there are four main differences between interviews and focus interviews. Firstly, those interviewed are known to be involved in the topic under research. The analyst enters the interview with some preconceived perceptions and issues which they wish to explore further. Generally the interview follows a semi-structured model as described below. Finally, the interview is focused on subjective experiences of the informants (Cohen and Manion, 1994:289). Focus interviews enable the researcher to validate and triangulate previous research.

Stainton (1996) uses informants in her study and stresses that the "linguist needs the insider" in order to increase the relevance and assist in the interpretation of the findings. She describes her methodology in detail and provides a reasonable blueprint for linguists who wish to use questionnaires as a method for collecting informant feedback. Stainton (1996) uses a questionnaire to asses the differences in what appears to be one genre, by asking 20 informants to label 22 different "review and technical memos". She then developed another questionnaire, which asked 20 different informants to rank the success of the 22 review and technical memos. However, as the present study aimed to collect qualitative data, interviews were preferred over questionnaires. The interviews allowed informants to voice queries relating to language, and also to elaborate, discuss and generate rich and meaningful data which could not reasonably be captured through questionnaire responses.

These informant interviews also provided an opportunity for a discussion between individuals where issues related to language and meanings were made explicit. Many of the individuals in the groups would not necessarily enter into similar discussions with colleagues or friends. The informants in the groups were able to acquire different perspectives related to the texts from their peers in the groups. They were able to exchange opinions, views, questions and comments on language and meanings with other individuals who were part of the workplace from which the texts derived. In general the informants would read such texts alone; the informant interviews thus potentially generated research input which is quite different from the 'real world'. However, continuing a theme intro-

duced in Chapter Four, the researcher's interpretations of these data are reported through the researcher's perceptions, and the researcher's perceptions are based on the informants' "own conceptual and perceptual lens" which may have been influenced in this context by their peers (Scott, 1996:67).

7.2.6 Piloting the informant interviews

In order to discover the best method for data collection, this study set out to pilot test data collection. After developing a set of interview protocols, a pilot interview was conducted with one informant. The informant then discussed the interview with the researcher and together the informant and researcher brainstormed possible methods for improving the data collection. A second pilot informant interview was conducted with a group of five informants participating in a semi-structured discussion which elicited views and opinions related to the linguistic features the informants believed to be salient in the given texts. Feedback was also collected from these informants on the methodology adopted. It was decided that five individuals discussing one text did not produce the optimum results; with five people talking at once a great deal of data would unavoidably be missed. At times, in such groups it was difficult for individuals to find a voice and certain individuals tended to dominate the discussion.

   Through these discussions with the pilot informants and after reflecting on the transcripts from the pilot interviews, it was decided that the most appropriate size for the focus group interviews would be three informants. A trial with a group of three informants and follow-up discussions with them confirmed that a group of this size worked effectively to stimulate debate while still leaving space for all to find a voice and express their views. Two participants could have been a possible combination; however, with only two informants in such a situation, the issue of 'personalities' would be extremely apparent, and it was thought that there may possibly be a lot of gaps or pauses in the discussion. The option of four participants was dismissed as this could allow for the informants to pair up and not engage in a fruitful discussion as part of a group. If a group of four broke into pairs, then it would be difficult to audiotape and capture the data. However, such a discussion on the significance of variation in size and combination of focus groups can at the present stage only be speculative. The benefits and negative characteristics of informant interviews and the size of the focus groups would be an interesting area for further research.

In the present study, the informant interviews continued with three participants in each group: there were four groups of business informants and three groups of EFL teacher informants. The data from the pilot group of five teacher informants were also included in the analysis, creating a total of 12 business and 15 teacher informants.

7.3   The procedures for the informant interviews

A semi-structured interview was purposefully selected in an attempt to overcome some of the researcher's inherent bias. Bell suggests that a semi-structured interview allows

> the respondent to express themselves at some length, but offers shape to prevent aimless rambling.

(Bell 1984:185)

Thus, throughout the informant interview the researcher gave shape to the interview, but allowed the informants to express what was centrally significant to them. The data that emerged directly reflected the methods used to collect the data. The method was a semi-structured set of questions and frequently the informants would discuss issues which were related but not explicitly included in the questions and prompts posed by the researcher. Often the interviewer would not fully complete a sentence, or the respondents interrupted the interviewer. This was encouraged as it meant that the power between the interlocutors was not always highly asymmetrical. It also allowed individual voices to emerge naturally.

Informants were given the option to be audio-recorded or not, and all agreed in writing to be taped. All groups were audiotaped and transcribed. The transcriptions were returned to the participants to allow them to amend them and to express their meaning more clearly. When reporting the data it was not possible to quantify the results as informants at times all spoke in simultaneously and on a few occasions the speaker was unidentifiable.

The instructions given to the informants were very simple, following Berry's data collection procedure (Berry, 1996). Even though she does not explicate her procedures in great detail, she offers a summary of the methodology. In addition, the researcher was a member of the 'Bristol writing group' where the data for Berry's paper were collected (Berry, 1996). Therefore, after playing the role of an informant, the researcher was well aware of the potential of this methodological approach. The procedure was to focus on one text at a time. The informants were asked to read the first text once and share their initial reactions to this text. Then they were asked to read the same text again, this time under-lining features they felt signalled a relationship between the writer and intended reader.

The group then discussed what they had underlined and what they felt was either important or interesting about the language used in the text. A more detailed discussion about the language of the memo ensued. Although the researcher was present, she only participated in the discussion either to clarify a point, to ask a probing question, to facilitate, or to conclude the discussion.

It was envisaged that by focusing on different interpretations of a small sample of two texts that detailed information and a consensus – or some shared understanding of the way in which a text makes meaning – might be reached. Naturally, it is possible to conduct such informant interviews with more texts but perhaps then only a superficial interpretation of a large number of texts would be possible and some of the details may be lost. Thus, a qualitative approach was employed and the discussion focused on two texts.

It was hypothesised that the order in which the texts were presented might have caused different reactions from the readers. Therefore to avoid biasing the results, the order of the memos was changed. This had only a minimal effect upon the informants' responses. When the groups discussed the memos in detail, there were points of consensus raised by all groups of informants, regardless of the order in which they read the memos.

7.4   The analysis of the data

Once the data were collected they were transcribed and analysed. This section outlines the procedures adopted in the analysis of the interview data. The data from the interviews were transcribed 'raw', without incorporating any coding of pauses, tonal variation, intonation, or other speech phenomena. Then, as noted above, the informants were sent copies of the interview data in order to allow them the opportunity to amend the texts so that the recorded data more closely reflected their views. Once the transcriptions were confirmed, the analysis of this rich source of data was conducted.

Bogdan and Bilken (1992), Creswell (1994, 1998) and Guba and Lincoln (1998) all advocate similar methods in the analysis of qualitative data. They suggest getting a general feel for the data, reading it from varying perspectives and making notes. They advocate using the words and metaphors in the data to help develop categories. Then the data can be recorded and sorted through the use of diagrams, graphs and tables which are based on the established categories. Creswell (1998) also suggests frequency counts of the data. However, frequency counts were not possible or of interest in this part of present study as they would distort and misrepresent the data. In the present study, informants were

involved in reading and re-reading the texts and on a number of occasions the informant would change their opinion on a related matter. A frequency count would therefore include an informant agreeing with one feature and disagreeing with the same feature later. The numbers would then cancel each other out and would provide fruitless information.

However, all the other steps suggested by Bogdan and Bilken (1992), Creswell (1994, 1998) and Guba and Lincoln (1998) were followed to some extent and what emerged was a rich resource of information which represented the informant interpretations of different linguistic features in the texts discussed. The present study diverged slightly from the suggestions made by the above authors in that the interviews were held in light of already existing data and analysis. The study had an established set of research questions as outlined in Chapter Five. The research questions posed in Chapter Five, which relate to the function of Theme, and the relationship between genre and Theme and the interpersonal and Theme, were used as the basis for developing more detailed questions based around Theme, genre and interpersonal meanings. The data were therefore explored with respect to the following questions:

1) What are the linguistic features which different groups of informants view as being salient in negotiating the interpersonal relationship between the writer and intended reader?
2) How do different groups/individuals interpret and react as readers of the texts?
3) Were groups/individuals sensitive to any specific generic constraint which were influencing the texts?
4) In what way were the groups/individuals sensitive to the interpersonal meanings construed through the choice of Theme in the texts?

From the data it appeared that the major findings emerging from the informants' interpretation of the texts were related to interpersonal features such as the choice of modals, finites and modality (e.g. *should*, *possibly* and other words that express probability; see Halliday, 1994:354), Circumstantial Adjunct, processes (e.g. verb choice such as *think*, *ensure*) and participants (e.g. the Subject *you*), textual Themes, layout and presentation. Interpersonal meanings were, as stressed above, not solely reliant on Theme. Interpersonal meaning is realised in a text in a multiplicity of ways. There is a wealth of data from the informant interviews which provide information for further research in this area; unfortunately due to limitations of space a full discussion of these data is not possible. As the present study's focus is Theme and interpersonal meaning, only data related to these choices will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

7.5   Concluding remarks

This chapter has provided a rationale and explanation for including an additional methodological tool. It discusses some of the considerations involved when conducting informant interviews. The procedures, including a description of the informants, the background to the texts and the steps taken during the interviews, have been presented. The inclusion of informant interpretations adds another perspective to the understanding of the relationship between thematic choices and interpersonal meaning. The informant interviews offer a different perspective beyond the researcher's analysis of the texts, and in this manner the opinions and interpretations offered enhance the validity of the research. The findings from the informant interviews are discussed in detail in the following chapter.