UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH PERSONAL AND REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS BY L1 MALAY SPEAKERS

SOO KUM YOKE

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ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH PERSONAL AND REFLEXIVE PRONOUNS BY L1 MALAY SPEAKERS

By

SOO KUM YOKE

Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2011
Dedicated to mum and dad,

The head and heart of this research…

And to the rest of my family for

the shoulder to cry on,
the elbow to nudge on,
the kick to move on,
the hand to hold on,
and the smile to carry on.
This study investigates the acquisition of English personal and reflexive pronouns by L1 Malay speakers in relation to the issues of development and parameter resetting in SLA within the Universal Grammar (UG) framework. In particular, we test the Failed Functional Features hypothesis proposed by Hawkins and Chan (1997) that parametric values associated with functional categories which are not instantiated in the learners L1 at the critical period of learning are not available for acquisition in their L2. A hundred and fifty respondents participated in this study. They were divided into three groups of fifty respondents each based on their proficiency levels. The instruments used were an independent proficiency test, a Grammaticality Judgement Test, a Binding Test and an Elicited Translation Task.

Malay personal pronouns do not differentiate gender and case features. Further, reflexive pronouns are not included in the Malay parts of speech. It is hence argued that these
parametric differences between the learners’ L1 and L2 would impede acquisition as the learners are unable to reset L1 parameters beyond the critical period of learning. They would therefore have to find other mechanisms in order to fit their L1 settings within the constraints of UG. The findings show that with longer exposure to the L2, the intermediate and advanced groups were better able to acquire the pronouns compared to the elementary group. However, their performances were still far from native speaker competency. The results also suggest that features which were available in the learners’ L1 such as the number feature were better acquired compared to the gender and case features in personal pronouns. While reflexives were not available in the learners’ L1, they were still able to acquire them because a substitute form of reflexive-like pronouns was found in the learners’ L1. Comparatively, reflexive pronouns remained more difficult to attain. Binding property A tested showed that the learners found it difficult to acquire the property because of influence from the parametric values of the pronouns tested which were problematic.
Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

PEMBELAJARAN KATA GANTINAMA DIRI DAN KATA GANTINAMA REFLEKSIF BAHASA INGGERIS OLEH PENTUTUR BAHASA MELAYU IBUNDA

Oleh

SOO KUM YOKE

Mei 2011

Pengerusi: Profesor Madya Wong Bee Eng, PhD

Fakulti: Fakulti Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi


Hukum binding A yang diuji menunjukkan bahawa pelajar mengalami kesukaran
mempelajarinya tetapi ujian lanjut yang dijalankan menunjukkan bahawa pengaruh dari perbezaan parametrik telah menpengaruhi keputusan.
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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 5th July 2011 to conduct the final examination of Soo Kum Yoke on her thesis entitled “The Acquisition of English Personal and Reflexive Pronouns by L1 Malay Speakers” in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U. (A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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Date:
DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis is my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously, and is not concurrently, submitted for any other degree at Universiti Putra Malaysia or at any other institution.

______________________________
SOO KUM YOKE

Date: 5 May 2011
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