



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**ELICITED IMITATION TEST AS A MEASURE OF L2 ENGLISH  
LEARNERS' INTERLANGUAGE REPRESENTATIONS OF RELATIVE  
CLAUSES**

**PAULINE TEO HWA LING**

**FBMK 2008 2**



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**MASTERS OF ARTS  
UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**2008**



## **DEDICATION**

*For my parents, Eddie Teo Swee Kim and Tan Meng Kim.*



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INTERLANGUAGE REPRESENTATIONS OF RELATIVE CLAUSES**

**By**

**PAULINE TEO HWA LING**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in  
Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree in Master**

**January 2008**



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts

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**July 2007**

**Chairman: Associate Professor Wong Bee Eng, PhD**

**Faculty: Modern Language and Communication**

This study examines the use of the Elicited Imitation Test (EIT) to measure second language learners' underlying knowledge of restrictive relative clauses which will reflect their interlanguage representation of this property. It also investigates the acquisition of relative clauses by two groups of L2 English learners: L1 Malay and L1 Chinese speakers. This study employed two different testing instruments, i.e. the Elicited Imitation Test and the Grammaticality Judgement Test. The study follows the operational definitions established by Ellis (2004), for two constructs corresponding to implicit and explicit knowledge of the linguistic property being tested.

Statistical analyses were carried out on the data obtained from the EIT and GJT. Results showed that learners were generally better at judging and imitating grammatical items in the both tests. Scores obtained were also comparable, indicating there was no significant difference between the mean scores obtained by the L1



Chinese and L1 Malay learners. However, it was discovered that when it came to ungrammatical items, learners were less determinate in their judgement and production. They were less proficient in their ability to imitate or judge and recast the ungrammatical items correctly. The results indicate that the L1 Malay and L1 Chinese learners of L2 English have interlanguage representations that differ from native speakers' underlying representations of the said property. In addition, a correlation coefficient analysis was also conducted between the grammatical and ungrammatical items in both the EIT and GJT, to determine if a correlation exists. The results from the coefficient analysis showed no correlation between the ungrammatical items in both the tests. However, there was a correlation between the grammatical items in the EIT and GJT. This result suggests that the grammatical items in both the tests measure implicit knowledge. A suggestion is forwarded as to why the ungrammatical items in the tests did not correlate.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains

**ELICITED IMITATION AS A MEASURE OF L2 ENGLISH LEARNERS'  
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**Oleh**

**PAULINE TEO HWA LING**

**Julai 2007**

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Kajian in menguji kesesuaian menggunakan Tugas Penuturan Lisan Semula (EIT) untuk menyelidik ilmu tersirat bagi klausa relatif di dalam Bahasa Inggeris serta pemerolehan klausa relatif oleh dua kumpulan penutur bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua, iaitu penutur Bahasa Cina dan penutur Bahasa Melayu. Selain daripada Tugas Penuturan Lisan Semula, satu lagi tugasan, iaitu Tugas Penilaian Tatabahasa (GJT) telah digunakan. Definasi pengoperasian bagi mengkaji ilmu tersirat (implicit knowledge) dan ilmu tersurat (explicit knowledge) yang ditunjukkan oleh Ellis (2004) digunakan bagi tujuan kajian ini.

Analisa statistik telah dijalankan ke atas kedua-dua tugasan. Keputusan analisa menunjukkan bahawa penutur lebih fasih dalam pemerolehan ayat yang mempunyai tatabahasa yang betul didalam tugasan. Namun, penutur kurang mampu menilaikan

ayat yang salah tatabahasa mahupun membetulkan ayat yang salah tatabahasa didalam tugas. Ini menunjukkan bahawa penutur mempunyai perwakilan tatabahasa yang berbeza daripada penutur asli Bahasa Inggeris.

Data yang diperolehi juga di analisa untuk memastikan kewujudan atau ketidakwujudan hubung kait di antara ayat yang betul tatabahasanya dan ayat yang mempunyai kesalahan tatabahasa di dalam kedua-dua tugas. Daripada analisa tersebut, didapati terdapat hubung kait antara ayat yang betul tatabahasanya di dalam kedua-dua tugas tetapi tiada hubung kait diantara ayat yang salah tatabahasanya. Hasil kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa ayat yang mempunyai tatabahasa yang betul boleh di gunakan untuk mengukur ilmu tersirat penutur terhadap klausa relatif didalam bahasa kedua mereka, iaitu Bahasa Inggeris. Perbincangan mengenai ketiadaan hubung kait diantara ayat yang salah tatabahasa di dalam kedua-dua juga menyusul.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I thank God for giving me the strength, inspiration and perseverance to complete this thesis.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to the chair of my supervisory committee, Associate Prof. Dr. Wong Bee Eng for constantly providing constructive and critical suggestions to improve my thesis. I am extremely grateful to her for being patient and encouraging me not only in my thesis but also in my work and health.

I thank the members of my supervisory committee, Associate Prof. Dr. Rosli Talif and Puan Ain Nadzimah, for giving me useful suggestions especially during my proposal defense and for allowing me to conduct the data collection for my thesis in their classes.

A special thanks to Dr. Ng Swee Chin for sacrificing her time and for patiently explaining the statistical analysis to me. My deepest appreciation also goes to the undergraduates of the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication who willingly participated in the tests for my study, without whom the thesis would not have been possible.

I am indebted to my other half, Kok Joon, for his endless support, help, understanding and love, and my parents, brother, Andrew and sister, Eileen. Their love and encouragement which never ceased always helps to keep me strong.

I would also like to thank my course mates Sharon and Lee Cheng for helping me by supplying reading materials and giving invaluable comments, as well as to my close friend, Margaret, for the friendship she has given me and for helping me to transcribe and tabulate my data.

Last but not least, I would like to convey my deepest appreciation to TAR College for funding my studies, my lecturers and course mates at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication as well as my colleagues in the Extra-Mural Studies Department who have helped me in one way or another.





This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree in Masters of Arts. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## **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 institutions.

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**PAULINE TEO HWA LING**

Date: 10 April 2008.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Agr	- Agreement
ANOVA	- Analysis of Variance
C	- Complementizer
CNP	- Complex Noun Phrase
CP	- Complementizer Phrase
D	- Determiner
DP	- Determiner Phrase
DST	- Dehydrated Sentence Test
DV	- Dependent Variable
E- Language	- Externalized Language
ECP	- Empty Category Principal
EDA	- Exploratory Data Analysis
EIT	- Elicited Imitation Test
ESL	- English as a Second Language
FV	- Factor Variable
GJT	- Grammaticality Judgement Test
I – language	- Internalized Language
IELTS	- International English Language Testing System
IL	- Interlanguage
ILG	- Interlanguage Grammar

IO	- Indirect Object
IP	- Inflection Phrase
IV	- Independent Variable
L1	- First language
L2	- Second language
LAD	- Language Acquisition Device
NP	- Noun Phrase
NPAH	- Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy
Obj	- Object
OComp	- Object of Comparison
OPrep	- Object of Preposition
OPT	- Oxford Placement Test
P & P	- Principles and Parameters
RRC	- Restrictive Relative Clause
SLA	- Second Language Acquisition
Spec	- Specifier
SPSS	- Statistical Package for Social Sciences
Subj	- Subject
UG	- Universal Grammar
V	- Verb
VP	- Verb Phrase

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background to the study**

Researches in second language acquisition have always fascinated linguists especially since the matter is ongoing and has yet to be ascertained. Works on second language learning began way back before the post-war period but developments in language acquisition studies only began to take place in the late 1950s with the publication of Noam Chomsky's book, *Syntactic Structures* (1957). While first language acquisition research started off with Roger Brown's Morpheme Studies in 1973, second language acquisition (SLA) studies began with those done by Dulay and Burt in 1973, 1974 and 1975 (Mitchell and Myles, 2004). In recent years however, besides finding out *what learners know* (language competence) and *how they know* what they know (language acquisition), researchers began to take interest in *how to find out* what learners know (language testing). Equal interests in both language acquisition, in particular, second language acquisition as well as language testing began to develop. This particular study investigates both of the areas mentioned on L1 Chinese and L1 Malay learners of L2 English in Malaysia as these two groups of learners represent the major ethnic groups in the country. In addition, there is an apparent difference between the two languages, in relative clause formation, which could lead to interesting results from

the study. The study uses Chomsky's Universal Grammar to explain the outcomes of the study.

### **Universal Grammar (UG)**

The theory of Universal Grammar (UG) was introduced in the early 1950s by the linguist Noam Chomsky in his review of *Verbal Behaviour* (1957). Chomsky's main concern about linguistics involves three important questions (in Cook and Newson, 1996):

What constitutes knowledge of language?

How is knowledge of language acquired?

How is knowledge of language put to use?

Chomsky believes that the main responsibility of a linguist is to explain what exactly the knowledge of language is and what is in the minds of speakers of different languages. The linguist is also responsible in determining how speakers acquire a certain language and finally how speakers use the language that they have acquired. Therefore, to answer the second and third questions, it must first be established what defines language (Cook and Newson, 1996: 3).



Before the emergence of UG, the main research paradigm was behaviourism, which was led by B. F. Skinner. However, Chomsky's review convincingly showed that the behaviourism paradigm was not suited to explain human language acquisition. Chomsky instead established the UG theory, which argues that human language is a mental existence in the mind of speakers. According to him, the language faculty is separated from other cognitive abilities such as intelligence. Chomsky postulated that the knowledge of language is an innate property in the human brain. This was a revelation which changed the course of study in language acquisition, as before the introduction of the UG theory, language acquisition was seen as just another form of behaviour like walking and singing. UG is therefore a theory of language knowledge and its main aim is to explain the structure of the mind.

As Cook and Newson write:

UG theory is not making vague or unverifiable suggestions about properties of the mind but precise statements based on specific evidence. The general concepts of the theory are inextricably connected with the specific details; the importance of UG theory is its attempt to integrate grammar, mind and language at every moment.

(Cook and Newson, 1996: 2)

The UG theory first started of as a theory to explain first language (L1) acquisition. However, soon after, researchers began to use it to account for second language (L2) acquisition. In L1 acquisition, Chomsky argues that a child is born with innate linguistic knowledge. The child acquires language with the assistance of a cognitive