



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH WH-QUESTIONS BY KADAZANDUSUN
SPEAKERS IN MALAYSIA***

JESSY MUIN

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**ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH WH-QUESTIONS BY KADAZANDUSUN
SPEAKERS IN MALAYSIA**

By

JESSY MUIN

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

March 2016

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TO BELDEN RAY GOODENOUGH

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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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March 2016

Chair: Associate Professor Wong Bee Eng, PhD

Faculty: Modern Languages and Communication

A number of studies have looked into the acquisition of English *wh*-questions by different first language (L1) groups. However, there is yet a study on the acquisition of English *wh*-questions by L1 Kadazandusun speakers of second language L2 English. This study, therefore, attempts to address this lack. It will test the claims and predictions of two competing hypotheses: the Full Transfer Full Access Hypothesis (FTFA) (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994, 1996) and the Representational Deficit Hypothesis (RDH) (Hawkins, 2005). The FTFA hypothesis proposes that post-childhood L2 learners start out with L1 parameterised features present in the syntactic functional categories and, subsequently, they are able to reset the L1 parameters to the L2 setting. RDH proposes that post-childhood L2 learners experience syntactic deficit in L2 if syntactic functional categories present in the L2 are not instantiated in the L1. *Wh*-questions in both English and Kadazandusun are formed via *wh*-movement. However, while English obeys movement constraints such as the Subjacency Condition (*Wh*-island Constraint, Sentential Subject Constraint and Complex Determiner Phrase Constraint) and Empty Category Principle (ECP) (Comp-trace effect), Kadazandusun does not seem to be sensitive to these constraints. A hundred and six (106) L1 Kadazandusun speakers of L2 English from three proficiency groups participated in the study. Three instruments, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (Allan, 2004), a Grammaticality Judgement Test (GJT) and Question Formation Test (QFT) (adapted from Wong, 1999) were administered to the participants. The OPT was used to group the participants into three proficiency groups while the GJT and QFT were used to test the participants' surface and underlying knowledge of English *wh*-questions. To test for significant differences of the results obtained from the three groups of participants, the nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test, followed by pairwise comparisons, was used to analyse the data. A nonparametric test rather than a parametric test was chosen to analyse the data because the participants were not randomly selected but they were selected by using the snowball sampling method. The findings showed that there seemed to be *wh*-movement in the L1 Kadazandusuns' interlanguage grammars. However, their underlying representations were far from native-like as they were not able to reject ungrammatical stimuli with Subjacency and ECP constraints. The

findings of the study thus seemed to support the RDH (Hawkins, 2005). Such findings are further contribution to the field of second language acquisition (SLA) literature, in particular to the partial access to Universal Grammar (UG) view in the acquisition of L2. In addition, the findings would have pedagogical implications for the English as a second language (ESL) classroom, in particular in the East Malaysian state of Sabah.



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

PEMEROLEHAN PERTANYAAN YANG BERMULA DENGAN 'WH' DALAM BAHASA INGGERIS OLEH PENUTUR KADAZANDUSUN DI MALAYSIA

Oleh

JESSY MUIN

Mac 2016

Pengerusi: Profesor Madya Wong Bee Eng, PhD

Fakulti: Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi

Beberapa kajian telah mengkaji pemerolehan pertanyaanyang bermula dengan 'wh' dalam bahasa Inggeris oleh kumpulan bahasa ibunda(B1) yang berbeza. Walau bagaimanapun, setakat ini belum terdapat kajian mengenai pemerolehan pertanyaan yang bermula dengan 'wh' dalam bahasa Inggeris oleh penutur Kadazandusun sebagai bahasa ibundadan bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua (B2). Oleh itu, kajian ini cuba menangani kekurangan tersebut. Ia menguji dakwaan dan ramalan dua hipotesis yang berbeza: Hipotesis *Full Transfer Full Access (FTFA)* (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994, 1996) dan *Representational Deficit Hypothesis (RDH)* (Hawkins, 2005). Hipotesis *FTFA* mencadangkan pelajar B2 selepas zaman kanak-kanak bermula dengan ciri parameter B1 yang hadir dalam kategori fungsi sintaksis dan, kemudiannya, mereka dapat menetapkan semula parameter B1 ke tetapan B2. *RDH* mencadangkan pelajar B2 selepas zaman kanak-kanak mengalami defisit sintaksis dalam B2 jika kategori fungsi sintaktik yang hadir dalam B2 tidak terjadi di dalam B1. Pertanyaan yang bermula dengan 'wh' dalam bahasa Inggeris dan Kadazandusun terbentuk melalui pergerakan 'wh'. Walau bagaimanapun, manakala bahasa Inggeris taat kepada kekangan pergerakan seperti keadaan *Subjacency* (Kekangan *Wh-island*, Kekangan *Sentential Subject* dan Kekangan *Complex Determiner Phrase*) dan *Empty Category Principle (ECP)* (kesan *Comp-trace*), bahasa Kadazandusun nampaknya tidak sensitif terhadap kekangan-kekangan ini. Seratus enam (106) penutur Kadazandusun sebagai B1 dan bahasa Inggeris sebagai B2 daripada tiga kumpulan kemahiran mengambil bahagian dalam kajian ini. Tiga instrumen, *Oxford Placement Test (OPT)* (Allan, 2004), *Grammaticality Judgement Test (GJT)* dan *Question Formation Test (QFT)* (diadaptasi daripada Wong, 1999) telah diberikan kepada para peserta. *OPT* digunakan untuk mengumpul peserta kepada tiga kumpulan kemahiran manakala *GJT* dan *QFT* telah diberikan kepada peserta untuk menguji mereka tentang pengetahuan permukaan dan dasar pertanyaan yang bermula dengan 'wh' dalam bahasa Inggeris. Untuk menguji perbezaan yang signifikan daripada keputusan yang diperolehi daripada ketiga-tiga kumpulan peserta, ujian bukan parametrik iaitu Kruskal-Wallis, diikuti dengan perbandingan pasangan, telah digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Ujian bukan parametrik telah dipilih untuk menganalisis data dan bukannya ujian parametrik kerana peserta tidak dipilih secara rawak tetapi mereka telah dipilih dengan menggunakan

kaedah persampelan bola salji. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa seolah-olah terdapat pergerakan 'wh' dalam tatabahasa bahasa antara peserta Kadazandusun. Walau bagaimanapun, perwakilan dasar mereka jauh daripada penutur bahasa Inggeris yang asli kerana peserta gagal menolak rangsangan yang tidak gramatis dengan kekangan *Subjacency* dan *ECP*. Hasil kajian ini nampaknya menyokong RDH (Hawkins, 2005). Penemuan tersebut merupakan sumbangan tambahan kepada kepustakaan bidang pemerolehan bahasa kedua, khususnya kepada pandangan separa akses *Universal Grammar (UG)* dalam pemerolehan B2. Di samping itu, hasil kajian akan memberi implikasi pedagogi untuk kelas bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua, khususnya di negeri Malaysia Timur iaitu Sabah.



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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 11 March 2016 to conduct the final examination of Jessy binti Muin on her thesis entitled “Acquisition of English WH-Questions by Kadazandusun Speakers in Malaysia” 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 Master of Arts.

Members of the Thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

Rosli bin Talif, PhD

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Afida binti Mohamad Ali, PhD

Senior Lecturer
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Internal Examiner)

Shanthi Nadarajan, PhD

Senior Lecturer
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak
Malaysia
(External Examiner)

ZULKARNAIN ZAINAL, PhD

Professor and Deputy Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 25 May 2016

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

Wong Bee Eng, PhD

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

Mardziah Hayati Abdullah, PhD

Associate Professor
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

BUJANG KIM HUAT, PhD

Professor and Dean
School of Graduate Studies
Universiti Putra Malaysia

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Signature:

Name of Chairman of
Supervisory
Committee:

Associate Professor Dr Wong Bee Eng

Signature:

Name of Member of
Supervisory
Committee:

Associate Professor Dr Mardziah Hayati Abdullah

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

| | | |
|-------------|---|--|
| FTFA | - | Full Transfer Full Access |
| RDH | - | Representational Deficit Hypothesis |
| L1 | - | First language |
| L2 | - | Second language |
| ESL | - | English as a second language |
| SPM | - | Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia |
| CPT | - | Cambridge Placement Test |
| CLT | - | Communicative Language Teaching |
| UG | - | Universal Grammar |
| SLA | - | Second language acquisition |
| SVO | - | Subject-Verb-Object |
| VSO | - | Verb-Subject-Object |
| ECP | - | Empty Category Principle |
| GJT | - | Grammaticality Judgement Test |
| QFT | - | Question Formation Test |
| POL | - | Pupils Own Language |
| KSS | - | Kadazan Society Sabah |
| OPT | - | Oxford Placement Test |
| P&P | - | Principles and Parameters |
| GB | - | Government and Binding |
| MP | - | Minimalist Program |
| L3 | - | Third language |
| OV | - | Object-Verb |
| V2 | - | Verb second |
| C | - | Complementizer |
| NP | - | Noun Phrase |
| ILGs | - | Interlanguage Grammars |
| RRCs | - | Restrictive relative clauses |
| ANOVAs | - | Analysis of variance tests of statistical significance |
| CPH | - | Critical Period Hypothesis |
| t | - | Trace |
| CP | - | Complementizer phrase |
| XP | - | X Phrase |
| Spec | - | Specifier |
| PRN | - | Pronoun |
| TP | - | Tense projection/Tense phrase |
| T | - | Tense |
| PP | - | Prepositional phrase |
| P-stranding | - | Prepositional Stranding |
| SSC | - | Sentential Subject Constraint |
| CNPC | - | Complex Noun Phrase Constraint |
| CDPC | - | Complex Determiner Phrase Constraint |
| CED | - | Condition on Extraction Domains |
| DP | - | Determiner phrase |
| VOS | - | Verb-Object-Subject |
| VP | - | Verb phrase |
| EPP | - | Extended Projection Principle |

| | | |
|----------|---|-----------------------------------|
| KDCA | - | Kadazandusun Cultural Association |
| GEN | - | Genitive |
| DES | - | Desiderative |
| AF | - | Actor focus |
| 1SG | - | First person singular |
| NM | - | Nominative |
| 3SG | - | Third person singular |
| RECP | - | Reciprocal |
| CONT | - | Continuative |
| RED | - | Reduplication |
| PL | - | Plural |
| 3PL | - | Third person plural |
| PF | - | Patient focus |
| BF | - | Benefactive focus |
| CPL | - | Completive aspect |
| PAR | - | Particle |
| KLF | - | Kadazandusun Language Foundation |
| SP | - | Stative predicate |
| EMP.PART | - | Emphatic particle |
| 2SG | - | Second person singular |
| INF | - | Infinitival |
| NOM | - | Nominative |
| OBL | - | Oblique |
| V | - | Verb |
| IP | - | Inflectional phrase |
| V1 | - | Verb-initial |
| SA | - | Standard Arabic |
| 1PL | - | First person plural |
| SD | - | Standard deviation |
| UPM | - | Universiti Putra Malaysia |

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study tests the claims and predictions of two competing hypotheses within the generative approaches: the Full Transfer Full Access (FTFA) hypothesis (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994, 1996) and the Representational Deficit Hypothesis (RDH) (Hawkins, 2005). To test these two hypotheses, the researcher investigated the acquisition of English *wh*-questions by first language (L1) Kadazandusun speakers of second language (L2) English. This chapter discusses the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the research questions formulated, the theoretical framework, the significance of the study and its limitations.

1.1 Background of the study

The English proficiency level of English as second language (ESL) learners in Malaysia has not improved despite it being introduced as a subject in school for nearly two decades. This lack of proficiency or incompetency in English can be seen in the results of national exams. A study conducted by the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 team reports that “only 28% of students achieved a minimum credit in the 2011 SPM English paper against Cambridge 1119 standards” (Blueprint, 2013, p. E22). Studies have been conducted on Malaysian school students, undergraduates and English teachers and findings report that the participants commit various grammar errors in English morphosyntax.

Studies on Malaysian secondary school students by Manokaran, Ramalingam and Adriana (2013), Hijjo (2013), Hong, Hajar Rahim Abdul, Hua and Khazriyati Salehuddin (2011), Saadiyah Darus and Subramaniam (2009), Saadiyah Darus and Ching (2009), Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin, Norsimah Mat Awal and Kesumawati Abu Bakar (2008), Wong and Soh (2007) and Wong and Chan (2005) show the most difficult problems faced by the participants in learning English. The grammar errors committed by the participants are related to tense shift, agreement, missing auxiliary ‘Be’, wrong verb form, addition, misformation and misordering (seven types of errors in the past tense auxiliary ‘Be’) (Manokaran et al., 2013), the plural marker ‘s’ and the ‘3rd singular’ in present tense (Hijjo, 2013). Preposition-related collocational errors (Hong et al., 2011), as well as those related to singular/plural form, verb tense, word choice, preposition, subject-verb agreement and word order (Saadiyah Darus and Subramaniam, 2009), mechanics, tenses, preposition and subject-verb agreement (Saadiyah Darus and Ching, 2009) affixes, adverbs, adjectives, plural forms, copula, subject-verb agreement (Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin et al., 2008), the definite article *the* (Wong and Soh, 2007) and relative clauses (Wong and Chan, 2005).

In some of these studies, the participants were young learners while in the other studies, the participants were older learners. It should be noted that child language acquisition, be it L1 or L2, do differ to some extent from acquisition in older learners. Some researchers (e.g. Krashen, 1989) do make a distinction between acquisition and learning among older L2 learners. In his acquisition-learning hypothesis, he states that acquisition is “a subconscious process that is identical to the process used in first language acquisition in all important ways” (p. 8) while learning is “conscious knowledge, or “knowing about” knowledge” (p. 8).

A poor command of English (55.8%) is said to be the main contribution to the unemployment of graduates in Malaysia (Kementerian Pengajian Tinggi, 2012). According to Noor Azina Ismail (2011), graduates are likely to be employed if they are proficient in English at the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM, the Malaysian Certificate of Education) level. Studies by Tse (2014), Loh (2013), Ahour and Mukundan (2012), and Ting, Mahanita Mahadhir and Chang (2010) on Malaysian undergraduates show the difficulty faced by the undergraduates in learning English as L2. The challenges faced by the undergraduates are singular/plural, articles, prepositions, adjective/noun, subject-verb agreement and tenses (Tse, 2014), categories of verb phrases and noun phrases in simple or compound/complex sentences (Ahour and Mukundan, 2012), prepositions, questions, articles, plural forms of nouns, subject-verb agreements and tenses (Ting et al., 2010). And while paraphrasing in English, the undergraduates perform errors such as grammar, syntax and lexis (linguistics), writing and paraphrasing (conventions) as well as content of message (semantics) (Loh, 2013).

Apparently, English language teachers themselves have difficulty with the language. Munir Shuib's (2009) study indicates that the primary school teachers have gaps in their knowledge of English grammar. In another study among undergraduates, it was found that attributes for success and failure in the learning of ESL is first, getting a good grade and second, teacher's influence (Thang, Gobel, Nor Fariza and Suppiah, 2011). From this study by Thang et al., (2011), teachers play a major role in the success of the learners' acquisition of the target language. Unfortunately, the results from the Cambridge Placement Test (CPT) taken by all the English teachers in Malaysia show that two-third of the teachers are “incapable” or “unfit” to teach the language in school (The Star Online, 2013).

Based on past studies, there are a few factors that contribute to the low proficiency of English language learners in Malaysia. Social surroundings such as an unenthusiastic attitude and lack of interest on learning the target language by the L2 learners plus the environment that does not encourage learners to use the target language have contributed to the low English literacy achievement among Malaysian learners (Nor Hashimah Jalaludin et al., 2008). In addition, other affective factors such as motivation, aptitude, strategy and ease of learning (Nikitina and Furuoka, 2006) contribute to the problems in acquiring the English language.

Furthermore, the English-in-education policies in Malaysia and their implementation at the school level have also contributed to the low proficiency level in English (Nor Liza Ali, M. Obaidul Hamid and Karen Moni, 2011; Chan and Tan, 2006). One of the policies of teaching English which has been replaced in 2012 is the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English at primary and secondary school levels (see Gill, 2014, 2012, 2003). There is also a mismatch between the curriculum and the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, assigned by the Ministry of Education in Malaysia and its implementation in the classroom (Reza Raissi, Faizah Mohamad Nor, Marzilah A. Aziz, Zaidah Zainal and Zanariah Md Saleh, 2013). Teachers resort to rote learning, recitation, instruction and exposition instead of the CLT approach in their teaching (Hardman and Norhaslynda A-Rahman, 2014) although the CLT approach has been introduced in Malaysian schools since the 1990s (Selvaraj, 2010).

In addition to state of affairs in relation to the status of English in Malaysia, more learner-centred factors also contribute to the level of English proficiency among ESL learners. Among these is the factor of transfer. Intra-lingual transfer is found to be the cause of the errors committed by Malaysian ESL learners (Hong et al., 2011; Saadiyah Darus and Ching, 2009). Inter-lingual transfer is also said to be the reason of low proficiency level of English in Malaysia (Ghabool, Mariadass and Kashef, 2012; Saadiyah and Ching, 2009; Saadiyah and Subramaniam, 2009 and Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin et al., 2008). ESL learners are unable to write simple sentences due to the different word-order and sentence structure between English and their L1 (Hijjo, 2013; Normazidah Che Musa, Koo and Hazita Azman, 2012; Nor Hashimah et al., 2008).

However, these studies mentioned above have not examined the errors within the generative framework such as the FTFA hypothesis (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994, 1996) and the RDH (Hawkins, 2005). There are very few studies conducted in Malaysia based on the generative framework (see e.g. Wong, 2008, 2002, 1999; Wong, Malaiappan and Chan, 2014; Soo and Wong, 2012; Wong and Chong, 2006; Wong and Hawkins, 2000). All these studies support the RDH (Hawkins, 2005) that “parameters not instantiated in the learners’ L1 are not available to them after the critical period, while principles which are universal remain operative even after this period” (Soo and Wong, 2012, p. 534).

The generative approach postulates that Universal Grammar (UG) includes principles and parameters. Principles in UG are always available for L2 learners. However, parameters in L2, which could be cross-linguistically different from those in L1, are difficult to be acquired by L2 learners after a certain age or critical period if they are not instantiated in their L1.

Southwood (2002) discusses the differing views on access to UG in second language acquisition (SLA). They are full access: Full Access, No Transfer (Epstein, Flynn and Martohardjono’s Full Access Hypothesis, 1996), Full Access, Full Transfer (White’s Parameter Resetting Hypothesis, 1988, Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994), and Full Access, Partial Transfer (Vainikka and Young-Scholten’s Minimal Trees Hypothesis, 1994,

Eubank, 1993/4); partial access: Partial But Direct Access (Krashen's hypotheses, 1985, Felix's Competition Model, 1985); Partial But Indirect Access, No Transfer (Clahsen and Muysken, 1989, Schachter's Window of Opportunity Hypothesis, 1989); and no access: No Access, Full Transfer (Bley-Vroman's Fundamental Difference Hypothesis, 1990).

This study is an attempt to test the claims and predictions made by the FTFA hypothesis (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994, 1996) and the RDH (Hawkins, 2005) by studying the acquisition of English *wh*-questions by the L1 Kadazandusun speakers of L2 English. *Wh*-questions in English involve *wh*-movement which is similar to Kadazandusun, at least on the surface. However, English has a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) word order and Kadazandusun is a Verb-Subject-Object (VSO) language. The difference between these two languages *wh*-question formation is while English observes two principles of UG, i.e. the Subjacency Condition and Empty Category Principle (ECP), Kadazandusun does not seem to be sensitive to these two constraints.

By using a Grammaticality Judgement Test (GJT) and a Question Formation Test (QFT), both adapted from Wong (1999), the researcher will test whether adult L1 Kadazandusun speakers of L2 English will be able to acquire the Subjacency Condition and ECP in English after the critical period of learning the L2 as these are not instantiated in their L1. The findings from this study could aid L2 educators and learners in their teaching and learning of English in the form of pedagogical implications that can be drawn.

1.2 Statement of the problem

As outlined in the background of the thesis, studies have been conducted on what and why grammatical errors are made by ESL learners in Malaysia. In particular, much has also been said about difficulty faced by many undergraduate ESL students at local universities. These students need to have an adequate competence level in order to accomplish tasks such as writing assignments, reports and projects at the university. For these adults, the acquisition or learning of the language might differ from younger learners in that they adult learners may be able to pick up certain features not found in the L1 through consciousness learning. There have been limited studies on this group of learners based on the generative framework done in Malaysia (for studies based on generative framework in Malaysia, see e.g. Wong, 2008, 2002, 1999; Wong et al., 2014; Soo and Wong, 2012; Wong and Chong, 2006; Wong and Hawkins, 2000). Studies based on the generative framework that investigated the acquisition of English *wh*-movement (*wh*-questions and relative clauses) in Malaysia are even more limited. They were done by Wong, Malaiappan and Chan (2014) on the acquisition of English relative clauses by Malaysian Tamil ESL learners and Wong (1999) and Wong and Hawkins (2000) on the acquisition of English *wh*-questions and relative clauses by Malay speakers.

Furthermore, thus far, there has been no study that tested the FTFA and RDH hypotheses particularly on the property of English *wh*-questions by adult L1 Kadazandusun speakers. Thus, there is a need for such a study. This study is an attempt to test the FTFA hypothesis and RDH on the acquisition of English *wh*-questions by adult L1 Kadazandusun speakers, an ethnic group from Sabah, Malaysia who speak a VSO language. English, on the other hand, is a SVO language.

1.3 Purpose of the study

This study is an attempt to investigate the acquisition of English *wh*-questions by adult L1 Kadazandusun speakers within the generative framework. This study is to test the claims and predictions made by the FTFA hypothesis (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994, 1996) and the RDH (Hawkins, 2005). The FTFA hypothesis proposes that post-childhood L2 learners start out with L1 parameterised features present in the syntactic functional categories and, subsequently, they are able to reset the L1 parameters to the L2 setting. The RDH proposes that post-childhood L2 learners experience syntactic deficit in L2 if syntactic functional categories present in the L2 are not instantiated in the L1.

1.4 Research questions

Based on the objective above, the following research questions are formulated for the study:

1. *Wh*-words are moved to clause-initial positions in question formation in Kadazandusun language which is similar to English. Will the L1 Kadazandusun speakers of L2 English be able to judge correctly the surface structure of English *wh*-argument questions that allow *wh*-movement to clause-initial position?
2. If the L1 Kadazandusun speakers of L2 English acquire *wh*-movement in English, will they show native-like knowledge in contexts constrained by the Subjacency Condition (*Wh*-island Constraint, Sentential Subject Constraint, Complex Determiner Phrase Constraint) and the Empty Category Principle (ECP) (Comp-trace effect) of English *wh*-questions?
3. Since Kadazandusun language does not obey the Subjacency Condition and ECP, is there evidence that the adult L1 Kadazandusun of L2 English speakers resort to solution(s) that are different from the English native speakers' production?
4. Do the findings from the study support the FTFA hypothesis or the RDH?

1.5 Theoretical framework

This study adopts the generative theoretical perspective. Two of the hypotheses that are widely accepted in the SLA literature are the FTFA hypothesis (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994; 1996) and the RDH (Hawkins, 2005). These will be tested in this study.

1.5.1 Full Transfer Full Access (FTFA) Hypothesis

The FTFA hypothesis (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994, 1996) is built on the premise that L2 children and adults are able to access to UG if L1 grammar constitutes the initial L2 grammar. According to the FTFA hypothesis, all lexical projections, functional structure, parameter settings and feature values can be transferred from L1 to the L2. As post-childhood L2 learners start out with L1 parameterised features present in the syntactic functional categories, subsequently, they are able to reset the L1 parameters to the L2 setting. Thus, post-childhood L2 learners are able to acquire syntactic competence in the L2, similar to child L2 learners. A more detailed discussion on the FTFA view is presented in chapter 2, section 2.2.1.

1.5.2 Representational Deficit Hypothesis (RDH)

The RDH (Hawkins, 2005) believes that UG is partially accessible to adult L2 learners. UG is partially accessible if syntactic functional categories present in the L2 are not instantiated in the L1. Thus, post-childhood L2 learners will acquire L2 syntactic incompetence at ultimate attainment to a level evident in child L2 learners, especially those features that are not instantiated in the L1 but are available in the L2. An in-depth discussion of the RDH is presented in chapter 2, section 2.2.2.

1.6 Significance of the study

The findings of this study are able to help both teachers and learners of L2 acquisition generally and ESL teachers and learners specifically. For example, teachers especially those teaching young ESL learners need to understand that L2 learners may not be able to acquire functional categories and other associated features that have not been instantiated in their L1 after a critical period (Hawkins, 2005).

For teachers teaching students after the 'critical period', they can, as much as possible, continually expose the students to different structures in the English language. Teachers, themselves, should be exposed to the generative theory and various theories of syntax so that they are equipped with theoretical knowledge of the English language and thus they are able to teach it more competently. This study is also beneficial to teachers teaching the Kadazandusun language as Pupils Own Language (POL) subject in schools in Sabah on functional syllabus as the linguistic assumptions about

Kadazandusun *wh*-questions that are presented in chapter 3, section 3.4, will benefit them in terms of adding to their syntactic knowledge of the language.

1.7 Limitations

Studies on Kadazandusun language are very limited. These studies are of different dialects: Kimaragang (Kroeger, 2012, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2005, 1996, 1991, 1990; Kroeger and Johansson, 2005), Bundu Tuhan (Atin, 2008; Price, 2007), Tindal Dusun (Robinson, 2006, 2005), Labuk-Kinabatangan (Hurlbut, 1990) and Kadazan (Miller and Miller, 1989; Gossens, 1924). The researcher had to rely on informants of the language from various parts of Sabah (Papar, Ranau, Kota Belud and Tamparuli) and a Kadazan dictionary published by the Kadazan Society Sabah (KSS) in 2011.

Choosing participants for this study is also a challenge. To find native speakers of Kadazandusun is difficult as Kadazandusuns prefer to speak the Sabah Malay dialect more often than their native language (Kijai, Lampadan and Loo, 2012; Cheong, 2010; Mahanita Mahadhir, Ting and Tumin, 2008; Reid, 1997; Noor Ainah Dani, 1996, 1993, also see David and Dealwis, 2008 for reasons of the language shift). The researcher had to resort to snowball sampling method and thus, this study cannot be generalised to the larger population of English as L2 language users in Malaysia. Another challenge is to find participants with advanced level of proficiency in the English language, i.e. a score of above 70 marks in the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) (Allan, 2004). There were only two out of the 122 participants in this study who could be classified as advanced ESL learners.

With regard to the language itself, it is listed as an endangered language under the UNESCO Endangered Languages Programme, the Kadazandusun language was listed as an endangered language (Discovery Channel and United Nations, 2004). There are various activities to promote and preserve the language. KDCA, the Kadazandusun Language Foundation (KLF) and the Kadazan Society Sabah (KSS), to name a few, are actively organising activities to promote and preserve the language. The government has also helped by offering it as an extra subject in school, under the POL policy since 1997.

1.8 Overview of the thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. The introduction is in Chapter 1 followed by Chapter 2 which is the literature review of past studies: introduction, second language acquisition (full access, partial access and the Critical Period Hypothesis) and summary of chapter 2. Chapter 3 discusses the linguistic assumptions adopted for the study. It includes a discussion of English *wh*-questions (*wh*-questions and violations), *Wh*-question formation in VSO languages, assumptions about Kadazandusun questions (Kadazandusun language, types of questions and movement in Kadazandusun question

formation) and summary of chapter 3. Chapter 4 describes the methodology, i.e. the introduction, predictions, design of the study, the pilot study, the main study (participants, sampling, procedure and instrumentations) and summary of chapter 4. Chapter 5 discusses the results obtained in the study. It includes the introduction, demographic profile of the participants, the results obtained from the OPT, GJT, and QFT and summary of chapter 5. Finally, chapter 6 concludes the study with a discussion of the four research questions, implications, and recommendations for future studies.



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