# Acquisition of English Tense and Agreement Morphology by L1 Malay and L1 Chinese Speakers

WONG BEE ENG
*Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication*
*Universiti Putra Malaysia*
*bee@fbmk.upm.edu.my*

ABSTRACT

*This paper reports on a study that investigates the acquisition of English tense and agreement morphology by Malaysian ESL (English as a Second Language) learners. These learners speak Malay and Chinese. In other words, they are Malaysian L1 Malay and L1 Chinese speakers of L2 English. The Failed Functional Features Hypothesis (Hawkins and Chan, 1997) serves as the framework for the study. The hypothesis claims that post-childhood second language (L2) learners experience syntactic deficits in the L2 if parameterised features present in the functional categories of the L2 are not specified in the L1. However, selected L1 features that correspond to L2 settings are able to enter L2 syntactic derivations. In terms of form-meaning relationships, it is predicted that a syntactic deficit resulting from an L1 influence will affect the assignment of native-like meanings to surface forms. And depending on the differences in the L1 and L2, learners from different L1 backgrounds will not show similar patterns of development. The study gathered data from the two groups of ESL learners in an attempt to compare the role played by the Chinese and Malay languages in the acquisition of the English property being investigated. A grammaticality judgement task (comprising both grammatical and ungrammatical items) was designed to test the learners' underlying knowledge of tense and agreement morphology in English. The task comprised 16 correctly inflected items with thematic and copula/auxiliary* be *verb forms, and 32 incorrectly inflected items. The findings suggest that apparent near native-like acquisition of the L2 property might not be the case when learners seem to have more difficulty with the ungrammatical items than the grammatical items. The findings of this study have pedagogical implications for the ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom.*

*Keywords: English tense and agreement morphology; interlanguage; Chinese; Malay; second language acquisition*

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research in the Malaysian context has focused mainly on how affective factors such as language attitudes, motivation, language anxiety and willingness to communicate have influenced the acquisition of English as a second language (ESL). Other studies have stressed on the learner as a social being. Such studies investigate socially constructed elements in learners' identities and their relationship with the acquisition or learning of the second language (L2) (see e.g. Mitchell and Myles, 2004). In the latter type of studies, elements focused on include social class, power, ethnicity and gender. Yet other studies have looked at cognitive factors such as language aptitude (e.g. Gardner and MacIntyre 1992) and the use of learning strategies that might have an effect on the acquisition of an L2. In the Malaysian context, very few non-native studies have been conducted with a view to investigating the learner as a language processor. In fact, such formal linguistic work is lacking for first language (L1) and L2 acquisition. Only some L2 studies in this tradition have been conducted in the local context (Wong 1999, 2002, Wong and Hawkins 2000, Wong and Chong 2006, Wong and Lim 2006). Such studies are important as their findings can aid in understanding the inner mental mechanisms particularly

from the generative linguistic perspective and the Malaysian linguistic scenario is a rich one in terms of the availability of the L2 learners for such studies.

SLA research in the last thirty years or so has made empirical observations about L2 learner performance that could not be explained by mere surface differences between the L1 and the L2 (Hawkins 2005). It became apparent that other explanations for what L2 learners know about the L2, and how that knowledge develops over time, were needed. Thus although some of the properties of SLA can be explained as transfer of properties from the native language, there are many that cannot. In fact, it has been shown that much of what happens in the language acquisition process is the result of unconscious internal mental processes, rather than conscious learning. This finding has important implications for the role of the language teacher. It suggests that many of the so-called 'errors' that language learners make are evidence for developing knowledge of the target L2 rather than faulty learning or teaching. The developing knowledge is known as Interlanguage (IL). Anecdotal observations have revealed that one syntactic aspect in English has posed particular difficulty to Malaysian ESL learners. This is in the tense and agreement morphology of English.

## FRAMEWORK

The study focuses on the acquisition of English tense and agreement morphology by L1 Malay and L1 Chinese learners and the Failed Functional Features Hypothesis (FFFH) (Hawkins and Chan, 1997) was put to test. The hypothesis claims that post-childhood L2 learners experience syntactic deficits in the L2 if specific parameterised features present in the functional categories of the L2 are not specified in the L1.[i] The view adopted here is that there is a critical period when features associated with functional categories come online and beyond this period, acquisition of features not instantiated in the L1 is not possible (Tsimpli and Smith 1991, Smith and Tsimpli,1995).

At the same time, selected L1 features that correspond to L2 settings are able to enter L2 syntactic derivations and in terms of form-meaning relationships, it is predicted that a syntactic deficit resulting from an L1 influence will affect the assignment of native-like meanings to surface forms (Hawkins and Chan 1997). In addition, depending on the feature inventory of the L1 and L2 pairings, learners from different L1 backgrounds will not show similar patterns of development.

## OBJECTIVES

This study investigates the acquisition of non-past tense and agreement morphology by Malaysian L1 Malay and L1 Chinese speakers of L2 English. The data is gathered using a grammaticality judgement task (GJT) to test the learners' underlying knowledge of the said grammatical property. This property is selected because Chinese is similar to Malay but both are very different from English in this aspect. This study aims to test the Failed Functional Features Hypothesis (Hawkins and Chan 1997) in the acquisition of English as an L2 and to do this, it sets out to:

a. determine the contexts in which English non-past tense and agreement morphology are more difficult for the L1 Malay and L1 Chinese speakers, and
b. analyse the nature of IL representations of the English non-past tense and agreement morphology among these speakers.

## LINGUISTIC ASSUMPTIONS

All three languages, Malay, Chinese and English are head-first languages in which the head of the phrase precedes its complements.[ii] Unlike English, however, both the Malay and Chinese languages do not have overt tense and agreement features.

### TENSE AND AGREEMENT IN ENGLISH

The formal features associated with the functional category of T(ense) are [±finite], AGR(eement) of person and number, as well as [±past] (Leung 2003, p. 200). Morphological tense marking in the form of inflection is obligatory in the English clause. Verbs in English provide information about whether the actions or events they describe are happening in the present, past or future. Hence, tense is marked on all English verbs: thematic, auxiliary and copula. The focus of this study is the non-past tense. Generally, the verb forms of non-past tense [-past] have finite and nonfinite ([±finite] features. A verb with the third person non-past tense agreement singular marker *–s* is always finite (e.g. *she plays the piano*). However, a root or bare form of a verb can either be finite or nonfinite. Bare forms that express the non-past tense are finite (e.g. *we play the piano*) (Radford et al. 1999, pp. 286-288). Thematic verbs do not raise in English. If the subject is third person singular (i.e. *she, he, it*) the verb in the non-past tense is inflected with the third person non-past tense agreement singular marker *–s*. However, when the subject is a plural pronoun, this inflectional morpheme is absent. Therefore, the subject and the marker *–s* are said to agree in the features of person and number known as agreement and the marker *–s* is said to belong to the INFL(ection) category AGR (Radford et al. 1999, pp. 283, 287).

In addition to thematic verbs, auxiliary *be* and copula *be* verbs also carry tense and agreement features. In [-past] tense, the subject and the auxiliary or copula verb which is raised to T have to agree in terms of the features of person and number whereby a singular subject takes on a singular form of the copula or auxiliary *be* verb, that is the suppletive *is*. Otherwise, inflections such as *am* or *are* are used to mark tense and agreement for singular first person or plural subjects consisting of two or more singular subjects (e.g. *I am a singer* (singular first person); *she is a singer* (singular third person); *we are singers* (plural first person); *I am singing* (singular first person); *she is singing* (singular third person)*; they are singing* (plural third person)). As mentioned earlier, verbal INFL in English consists of formal features associated with Tense (T): [±finite], [±AGR] and [±past].

### TENSE AND AGREEMENT IN MALAY AND CHINESE

Unlike English, Chinese (Leung 2003) does not have T and AGR as a grammatical category. Hence, distinctive formal features such as parameterized [±past], [±finite] and [±agreement] features are lacking in Chinese (Soong and Wong 2005, p. 26). The variety of Chinese language referred to in this paper is Mandarin Chinese which is spoken by all the participants in this study. Similar to Chinese, Malay does not have overt tense or agreement morphology, i.e. it lacks the formal features of [±past], [±finite] and [±agreement] for the functional category of T. The common feature among the three languages (Malay, Chinese and English) is their word order. All have the SVO (subject verb object) order for the major sentence constituents. The only difference is the Adjective Phrase (AP) in Malay, which is head last. However, we do not consider this aspect in this paper.

Since both the Malay and Chinese languages do not have overt tense or agreement morphology, thematic verbs have the same form for all the different time references. In other words, thematic verbs in these languages do not have inflectional endings for T as well as for

person and number agreement while in English, a verb may take on different inflectional endings depending on the person and the number of the subject. As such, L1 Malay and L1 Chinese speakers of L2 English would have to acquire English functional categories such as T and AGR with their associated formal features in acquiring English as a L2.

In addition, in the Malay language there are only two overt forms of the equivalent of the copula: *ialah* and *adalah*. The use of these forms is often optional and the selection is not related to tense, number or aspect features but is dependent on the relation of the predicate to the subject of the main clause. The form *ialah* is used in equative NP cases, where the subject is the same as the predicate while *adalah* may be used for ascriptive constructions with predicate APs describing or qualifying the subjects (Nik Safiah Karim 1995, pp. 210-215).[iii] However, the locative constructions do not take either as a rule.[iv] According to Yap (2007 p. 19), *adalah* is composed of the existential *ada* and the particle *lah* while *ialah* comprises the pronoun *ia* (third person singular) and the particle *lah*. The existential *ada*, in its function to introduce new information, echoes the predicational use of *adalah*. The pronoun *ia* and particle *lah* together as *ialah* has a specificational use and it clarifies the given information (the antecedent). At this point, the writer postulates a third copula in Malay and that is the null copula Ø. The following are examples of how the copulas are used in Malay:

1. John ialah/ Ø seorang guru.
   John Cop/ Ø CL[v] teacher
   John is a teacher.

2. Lina adalah/ Ø cantik.
   Lina Cop/ Ø beautiful
   Lina is beautiful.

3. Tabiat merokok adalah/ Ø haram bagi umat Islam.
   Habit smoke Cop forbidden P muslims
   The habit of smoking is forbidden for muslims.

4. Lina Ø di Klang.
   Lina Ø in Klang
   Lina is in Klang.

However, the equivalent of sentences such as *she is singing* is rendered as:

5. Dia sedang menyanyi.
   s/he Prog ASP sing
   S/he is singing.

Here, an aspectual marker is used to indicate the progressive.

Similarly, in Chinese, ascriptive constructions are without a copula. The exception though is an element similar to the adverb *very* is used. If this element is absent, the construction is odd in Chinese[vi].

6. wo hen ai
   I very short
   I'm very short.

7. Ta hen fu you
   s/he very rich
   She's/He's very rich

With regard to equative constructions, Chinese makes use of the overt copula *shi* while in locative constructions, no overt copula is needed.

8. ta shi ge zuqiu yuan
   s/he Cop CL football player
   S/He is a football player.

9. ta men Ø zai xuexiao
   they at school
   They are at school.

The equivalent of sentences such as *she is singing* in Chinese is the following:

10. ta zheng zai chang ge
    s/he Prog ASP sing song
    S/He is singing.

The examples of sentences above show that both Chinese and Malay make use of an aspect marker to indicate the progressive form.

In English, it is generally accepted that the copula-*be* verb forms are generated in the same structural position as auxiliary-*be* forms. Both the copula-*be* and the auxiliary-*be* verb move to INFL to check off number and tense features, i.e. the copula *be* and auxiliary *be* originate inside the verb phrase (VP), and subsequently move to INFL (Pollock 1989, Ouhalla 1999, Hawkins 2001, Poole 2002, in Soong and Wong 2005).

In view of the differences in the way T is manifested between English on the one hand, and Chinese and Malay on the other, it is predicted that L1 Malay and L1 Chinese learners of L2 English would have difficulty in the acquisition of English T and AGR morphology. In fact, some past studies have shown that L1 Chinese speakers of L2 English indeed have difficulty with English tense and agreement morphology (Lardiere 1998 a, b). In Lardiere's studies, her participant's low use of such morphology could be a result of the total absence of overt inflection in Chinese (White 2003, p. 190).

## METHODOLOGY

The study compared proficiency-matched intermediate and advanced L1 Malay and L1 Chinese speakers, whose proficiency was determined by their scores in the Malaysian University English Test (MUET). Students from a local institution of higher learning participated in the study. In other words, the participants were adult learners. The formation of the two groups (advanced and intermediate) was based on a score of bands 4-5 for the advanced group and a score of band 3 for the intermediate group. In total 21 L1 Chinese and 39 L1 Malay speakers participated in the study. Of the 21 Chinese speakers, 12 were classified as lower intermediate and nine (9) as higher intermediate in terms of their proficiency levels. Of the 39 Malay speakers who participated in the task, 22 were at the lower intermediate level and 17 were at the higher intermediate level.

A grammaticality judgement task (GJT) was used to collect intuitive data. The administration of the GJT was time controlled and presented bimodally, that is respondents read and listened to the same sentence being spoken on the tape simultaneously before judging the acceptability of the said sentence. This can reduce the chances that results of the judgment made by the subjects were based on rote learning or other learning strategies, as well as on semantic rather than syntactic knowledge. This task was administered to the participants in one sitting.

The GJT, which was adapted from Ionin and Wexler (2002)[vii], is described in more detail here. It was designed to test the learners' underlying knowledge of English tense and agreement morphology. The task consisted of 48 items. Each item was a single sentence in English with the types as follows:

GRAMMATICAL ITEMS

16 correctly inflected items

- 8 with thematic verbs (e.g. The girl writes a letter.) (GI Theme – Grammatical Thematic verb with/without inflection)
- 8 with copula/auxiliary (e.g. The cat is running. / The boy is tall.) (GI Aux - Grammatical Auxiliary Verb) (GI Cop Adj - Grammatical Copula with Adjective)

The rationale for using only ascriptive constructions (grammatical copula with adjective) is due to the fact that both Malay and Chinese allow copula-*less* constructions with adjective predicates. At the same time, Malay also has the option of the overt copula *adalah* in ascriptive constructions while Chinese requires the adverbial *hen* in copula-*less* ascriptive constructions. Further, the number of items in the test was controlled to prevent fatigue among the participants.

UNGRAMMATICAL ITEMS

32 wrongly inflected items

- 8 with thematic verbs (e.g. The boy want the toy. / The children likes chocolate.) (OM Theme – Ungrammatical omission of non-past third person singular morpheme) (TAT – Ungrammatical with non-past third person singular morpheme with a plural subject)
- 8 with copula/auxiliary (e.g. The girl are short. / The boys is playing football.) (TA Aux – Ungrammatical wrong auxiliary) (TA Cop – Ungrammatical wrong copula)
- 8 with omission of copula/auxiliary (e.g. The boy angry. / She swimming in the sea.) (OM Cop – Ungrammatical omission of copula) (OM Aux – Ungrammatical omission of Auxiliary)
- 8 with overgeneration of copula (e.g. The lady is sit on the bench. / I am buy a cake for my mother.) (OG – Ungrammatical overgeneration of the copula)

The participants were given 30 minutes to answer all the items. In the task, the participants were requested to judge whether an item is grammatical or ungrammatical. The test items were coded for verbal morphology and the data collected were reported in terms of mean percentages.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 below summarizes the data obtained from the GJT.

TABLE 1. Comparison of results of items on the GJT for the two groups

| Group/ Item type | Malay Lower Intermediate (N = 22) % | Chinese Lower Intermediate (N = 12) % | Malay Higher Intermediate (N = 17) % | Chinese Higher Intermediate (N = 9) % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| GI Theme | 92.04 | 94.79 | 94.85 | 98.61 |
| GI Cop Adj | 96.58 | 100.00 | 97.06 | 100.00 |
| GI Aux | 100.00 | 100.00 | 98.53 | 100.00 |
| **OM Theme** | **34.09** | 82.29 | 60.29 | 88.89 |
| **TAT** | **57.39** | 80.21 | 75.00 | 88.89 |
| TA Aux | **78.41** | 93.75 | 95.59 | 94.44 |
| TA Cop | **77.27** | 93.75 | 86.76 | 88.89 |
| **OM Cop** | **61.36** | **77.08** | **82.35** | **75.00** |
| **OM Aux** | **46.59** | **52.08** | **76.47** | **77.78** |
| **OG** | **57.95** | **68.75** | **80.88** | **83.33** |

In general, both groups of participants did not have difficulty with the grammatical items (GI Theme, GI Cop Adj, GI Aux). In other words, they were able to use the non-past inflection, both singular and plural appropriately with thematic verbs. They were also accurate in their judgement of the grammatical auxiliary *be* and copula *be* (with adjective) items. Thus it would seem that the L1 Malay and L1 Chinese speakers have acquired the English non-past tense and agreement morphology (inflectional and suppletive forms) as their scores are all above 90%.

However, it is evident that both groups of learners did not perform equally well in the ungrammatical items. For a learner to have achieved native-like competence in a particular L2 property, they would have to have accurate intuition of both grammatical and ungrammatical items in a task. The results in the table above indicate that the learners, particularly those in the lower intermediate group have problems with the following ungrammatical items.

- OM Theme – Omission of non-past third person singular morpheme with thematic verbs
- TAT – Non-past third person singular morpheme with a plural subject
- OM Cop – Omission of copula
- OM Aux – Omission of auxiliary
- OG – Overgeneration of copula

In other words, they were not able to judge appropriately and reject the ungrammatical items to a native like level. Instead a number of them accepted such ungrammatical structures. In particular the Malay groups have difficulty with ungrammatical items with omission of non-past third person singular morpheme with thematic verbs, and ungrammatical items with non-past third person singular morpheme with a plural subject (lower intermediate 34.09% and 57.39% respectively; higher intermediate 60.29% and 75.00% respectively). It seems that the L1 Malay speakers were indeterminate in their judgement of these items even at a higher level of competence.

Both of the lower intermediate groups (Malay and Chinese) had difficulty with the items on ungrammatical omission of the copula (61.36%, 77.08% respectively), and ungrammatical omission of the auxiliary (46.59%, 52.08% respectively). It is perhaps not surprising as in Malay there is an option of leaving out the equivalent of a copula (*adalah*, *ialah*) in similar copula constructions, such as *he is tall* is 'copula–less'. As mentioned earlier, it is postulated that Malay has a null copula for such copula-like constructions (e.g. *dia tinggi* – s/he tall). Similarly, Chinese also allows for a null copula in such constructions, although with an adverb similar to *very* (*ta hen goa* – s/he very tall). As a result, learners in both lower intermediate groups have accepted omission of copula items from approximately 23% (L1 Chinese) to 39% (L1 Malay). With regard to the items on omission of auxiliary *be*, learners accepted about 50% of the ungrammatical items (53.41% lower intermediate Malay, 47.92% lower intermediate Chinese). This result seems even more significant as the learners were performing at chance level. If we accept the postulation that in English, the copula *be* verb forms are generated in the same structural position as auxiliary *be* verb forms and that both move to INFL to check off number and tense features (Pollock 1989, Ouhalla 1999, Hawkins 2001, Poole 2002, in Soong and Wong 2005), then the result is not surprising. It is probable that the respondents have identified the auxiliary *be* to be the same as the copula *be* although the former structure is further complicated with the progressive aspect inflection – *ing*. In addition, the similar progressive construction in Malay and Chinese use aspectual words (*sedang* in Malay and *zheng zai* in Chinese). Thus the difference in form in realising the progressive in English on the one hand, and Malay and Chinese on the other, has resulted in difficulty for the learners in their acquisition of the auxiliary *be* form in English. However, the more advanced learners stabilised at around 80% correct judgement for both sets of items, indicating progress with proficiency. These results indicate that they do have difficulty in their judgement of the two sets of items. Similarly, the lower intermediate groups also correctly rejected the items on ungrammatical overgeneration of the copula at levels of 57.95% (Malay) and 68.75% (Chinese). In other words, 42.05% and 31.25% of the Malay and Chinese lower intermediate groups incorrectly accepted these ungrammatical constructions respectively. Again both groups stabilised at around 80% correct judgement at the more advanced level. The results here show that the learners were indeterminate where the use of the copula is concerned. Clearly, they do overgenerate the copula in their IL grammars as well. Data for the other items show developmental progress as would generally be the case if learners' IL grammars converge on the target form over time with a higher level of proficiency or competence. In other words, they exhibit staged development in their IL grammars.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although Malay and Chinese lack tense and agreement as a grammatical category, the learners seem to have no difficulty in accepting the grammatical items with thematic verbs, copula *be* and auxiliary *be*. However, they have difficulty with the ungrammatical items. Since T and AGR in Chinese and Malay are underspecified and hence do not have the formal features of parameterized [±past], [±finite] and [±agreement], this lack could have hampered their acquisition of the features in English. This finding is in line with the proposal put forth by the FFFH (Hawkins and Chan 1997) that states that post-childhood L2 learners are not be able to acquire functional features that have not been instantiated in the learners' L1. In this case, it is the category of T and AGR with its associated formal features. However, at the ultimate attainment level, even at the lower intermediate level, they are able to restructure their surface morphology and seem to have reached native like level, assuming a 80% cut-off point (see e.g. Wong 1999, 2002). In other words, the results indicate that some learning has

occurred with regard to the surface morphology associated with English functional categories and their associated features of T and AGR. However, their underlying representation of these categories seems to differ from those of native speaker as they have some difficulty with the ungrammatical items.

The findings of this study can have pedagogical implications for the L2 classroom. If learners are not able to acquire functional categories and their associated features that have not been instantiated in their L1 and if they were to learn the L2 after a critical period (Tsimpli and Smith 1991, Smith and Tsimpli 1995), then they will have persistent difficulty in this endeavour. However, by enhancing the relevant input for this aspect of grammar, the 'triggering of unconscious development' in this aspect will be maximized (Hawkins 2005). This means that we should get learners to interact with samples of the target L2 which exemplify a wide range of structures (Hawkins 2005), including examples of non-past third person singular *–s*, copula *be* and auxiliary *be*, between subjects and verbs.

## REFERENCES


Gardner, R. C. & MacIntyre, P. D. (1992). A student's contributions to second language learning. Part I: cognitive variables. *Language Teaching* 25, 211-20.

Hawkins, R. (2005). Understanding what second language learners know. In Wong, B. E. (Ed.). *Second language acquisition: Selected readings* (pp.1-18). Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Sasbadi.

Hawkins, R. & Chan Y.H. (1997). The partial availability of Universal Grammar in second language acquisition: the failed functional features hypothesis. *Second Language Research* 13 (3): 187-226.

Ionin, T. & Wexler, K. (2002). Why is 'is' easier than '-s'?: acquisition of tense/agreement morphology by child second language learners of English. *Second Language Research.* 18, 95-136.

Lardiere, D. (1998a). Case and tense in the `fossilized' steady state. *Second Language Research.* 14, 1-26.

Lardiere, D. (1998b). Dissociating syntax from morphology in a divergent L2 end-state grammar. *Second Language Research.* 14, 359-375.

Leung, Y. I. (2003). Failed features versus full transfer full access in the acquisition of a third language: Evidence from tense and agreement. In *Proceedings of the 6th generative approaches to a second language acquisition conference (GASLA 2002)* (pp. 199-207). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

Lenneberg, E. (1967). *Biological Foundations of Language*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Lian, Y. F. (2007). Acquisition of non-past tense and agreement morphology by Chinese ESL learners. Unpublished Masters project, UPM.

Miller, J. (2008). *An introduction to English syntax* (2nd ed.). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Mitchell, R. & Myles, F. (2004). *Second Language Learning Theories* (2nd ed.). London: Hodder Arnold.

Nik Safiah Karim (1995). *Malay Grammar for Academics and Professionals*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.

Radford, A., Atkinson, M., Britain, D., Clahsen, H. & Spencer, A. (1999), *Linguistics: an Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, N. V. & Tsimpli, I. M. (1995). *The mind of a savant: language learning and modularity.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Soong, L.C. & Wong, B. E. (2005). The nature of copula BE in the interlanguage English of L1 Chinese learners. In Wong, B. E. (Ed.). *Second language acquisition: Selected readings* (pp. 19-46). Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Sasbadi.

Tsimpli, I. M. & Smith, N. (1991). Second-language learning: Evidence from a polyglot savant. *UCL Working Papers in Linguistics*. 3, 171-183.

White, L. (2003). *Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wong, B. E. & S. Y. L. Chong (2006**).** Non-native grammars: L2 representation of English locational and directional prepositions. In Allan, K. *Selected Papers from the 2005 Conference of the Australian Linguistic Society*. http://au.geocities.com/austlingsoc/proceedings/als2005/wong-chong-prepositions.pdf

Wong, B. E. & Lim, S. N. (2006). Literacy in a foreign language: The learning of French pronouns by ESL learners. *3L: Language, Linguistics, Literature The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*. 12, 107-127.

Wong, B. E. & Hawkins, R. (2000). An unexpected wh-phrase extraction asymmetry in the advanced L2 English of Malay speakers. In Juffs, A., Talpas, T. W., Mizera, G., and Burtt, B. (Eds.). *Proceedings of GASLA IV* (Vol. IV). Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Working Papers in Linguistics, pp. 226-241.

Wong, B. E. (2002). Acquisition of English relative clauses by Malay speakers. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*. *6* (1), 61–77.

Wong, B. E. (1999). Acquisition of Wh-Movement in English Questions and Relative Clauses by Speakers of Malay. Unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Essex, United Kingdom.

Yap, F. H. (2007). Nominalizers (and copulas) in Malay. Paper presented at the International Workshop on Nominalizers and Copulas in East Asian and Neighboring Languages, Chinese University of Hong Kong, January 8-12.

[i] The notion of post-childhood here is taken to mean the period beginning with the onset of puberty (see e.g. Lenneberg, 1967).

[ii] For example, in the PP, 'in Klang', the head is the preposition 'in' and the NP 'Klang' is the complement. The equivalent in Malay is 'di Klang' (Prep Klang) and in Mandarin Chinese, 'zai ba sheng' (Prep Klang).

[iii] Information on Malay is also obtained from data elicited from native speakers in Malaysian. The informants' input indicates that ascriptive constructions may also be rendered without the copula *adalah*.

[iv] The description here follows the terms used for copula constructions in English (see Miller, 2008, pp. 34-35).

[v] CL - Classifier

[vi] Information on Chinese is obtained from data elicited from native speakers in Malaysia.

[vii] See also Lian (2007).