

The Acquisition of Wh-Questions amongst Malay Preschool Children

by

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This paper attempts to investigate asymmetries between the acquisition of different types of *wh*-questions and the approximation of childrens' *wh*-questions to adults. Stromswold (1995) in studying spontaneous speech of 12 English speaking children found that the children typically tend to acquire object questions at the same time or earlier than subject questions. Wilhem & Hanna (1992) found that children aged 3:4 -3:6 do poorly on both subject and object *wh*-questions production while older children between 4:1-4:7 performed better on subject questions compared to object questions production. In this study 36 preschool children between ages of 4 yrs-6 yrs with six months interval were selected for the study. Each subject was given two separate tasks of comprehension and production; one task was to have subjects answer *wh*-questions based on a picture story, the other task was to have subjects pose *wh*-questions to an alien puppet in order to know about the alien. Our findings revealed that there is significant increase in the understanding of *wh*-questions across the age range; younger children tend to understand the *apa* (who), *siapa* (who), *kat mana* (where) questions while older children progressed on to questions which include *apa pasal* (why), *macam mana* (how). Surprisingly, such patterns were not evident in the production tasks. In addition to that, the *wh*-questions produced by the subjects were indicative of the colloquial *wh*-questions used by adults.