

**THE ACQUISITION OF WH QUESTION BY EFL STUDENTS'  
LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

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Written by

**ELLEN ANDRIYANI**

**S200140089**

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ELLEN ANDRIYANI

S200140089

HAS BEEN APPROVED BY

First Advisor



Prof. Endang Fauziati, M. Hum

Second Advisor



Muamaroh, Ph. D

APPROVAL OF ARTICLE PUBLICATION FOR SUBMISSION  
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Submitted by:  
**Ellen Andriyani**  
S200140089

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The Examiner Board:

1. Prof. Endang Fauziati, M. Hum  
(Examiner I)
2. Muamaroh, Ph. D  
(Examiner II)
3. Dr. Anam Sutopo, M.Hum.  
(Examiner III)



The Director of Graduate School  
  
Dr. Khudzaifah Dinyati

## STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

I am the writer of this thesis,

Name : Ellen Andriyani

NIM : S200140089

Program : Magister of Language Study

Focus on : Linguistics

Title

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Ellen Andriyani

S200140089

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Ellen Andriyani

S200140089

[helenaellen821@gmail.com](mailto:helenaellen821@gmail.com)

Magister of Language Study

Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta

## ABSTRACT

**Andriyani, Ellen. "The Acquisition of Wh Question by EFL students' learning English as a Foreign Language". Thesis. English Department, Post Graduate Program. Muhammadiyah University, Surakarta. 2016.**

This study aims to describe the acquisition of wh question by EFL students' learning English as a Foreign Language. Especially to describe the patterns of question written by the students of the seventh and the ninth grade students of junior high school and the eleventh grade students of senior high school. Then the development patterns of question between three of them. The method of this study was qualitative and cross-sectional study.

The writer analyzed the patterns of question written by the seventh grade, the ninth grade, and the eleventh grade students. Then the writer combined the theory by Dulay et al (1982: 128) and Freeman-Larsen (1991: 93). The writer found that there are three stages of the development pattern of question: Stage two: Uninverted WH (+/- aux.). "wh question + S + verb". Step three: The early auxiliaries. "wh question + unanalyzed to be + S + verb". Stage four: The learner reaches the full target system. "wh question + analyzed to be + S + verb".

**Keywords:** *Development, Patterns, Wh question*

## ABSTRACT

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Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan pemerolehan kata Tanya wh oleh siswa EFL yang mempelajari bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa Asing. Terutama untuk mendeskripsikan pola pertanyaan yang ditulis oleh siswa sekolah menengah pertama kelas tujuh, pola pertanyaan yang ditulis oleh siswa sekolah menengah pertama kelas sembilan, pola pertanyaan yang ditulis oleh siswa sekolah menengah atas kelas sebelas. Kemudian perkembangan pola pertanyaan yang ditulis oleh siswa sekolah menengah pertama kelas tujuh, siswa sekolah menengah pertama kelas Sembilan, siswa sekolah menengah atas kelas sebelas. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dan cross-sectional.

Penulis menganalisa pola kalimat pertanyaan yang ditulis oleh siswa kelas tujuh, Sembilan, dan sebelas. Kemudian penulis menggabungkan teori dari Dulay et al (1982: 182) dan Freeman-Larsen (1991: 93). Penulis menemukan ada tiga tahap perkembangan pola pertanyaan yang ditulis oleh siswa sekolah menengah pertama kelas tujuh, siswa sekolah menengah pertama kelas Sembilan, siswa sekolah menengah atas kelas sebelas. Perkembangannya yaitu: Stage two: Uninverted WH (+/- aux.). "wh question + S + verb". Step three: The early auxiliaries. "wh question + unanalyzed to be + S + verb". Stage four: The learner reaches the full target system. "wh question + analyzed to be + S + verb".

***Kata kunci:*** Perkembangan, Pola, Kata Tanya Wh

## A. Introduction

Question is always produced in communication even in every event. It is supported by Morishita and Harada (2015) who states that “effective language communication consists of a series of questions and responses”. It means that communication will be run well if there is appropriate question and respond. Morishita and Harada (2015) also add the statement that “both the ability to comprehend and respond to question sentences properly and the ability to produce question sentences quickly and accurately based on the interlocutors’ utterances are essential and indispensable in real-time communication”.

It is known that English is an international language. As Freeman-Larsen (1991: 1) state that English a second language for most of the people of the world, has increasingly become the international language for business and commerce, science and technology, and international relations and diplomacy. English in Indonesia is taught as a foreign language. Therefore English is not used for daily communication in social intercourse.

English is a language which used widely all over the world. There are some countries use English as the second language and some other countries learn English as a foreign language like Indonesia. It is supported by Gebhard (2000: 2) who states that by EFL I mean English as studied by people who live in the country, such as Italy, Saudi Arabia, and Korea. Also Brown (2001: 116) adds that foreign language contexts are those in which students do not have ready-made contexts for communication beyond their classroom. It means that to comprehend question and respond in English are needed. Unfortunately the question pattern between Indonesian and English is different. The difference between Indonesian and English patterns of question make it rather difficult for Indonesian EFL students to comprehend English grammar especially English patterns of question.

Indonesian learners learn English is as a foreign language. It is known that a language which is learnt by EFL learners’ called interlanguage. Fauziati (2009: 157) states that interlanguage is a study on the language of

the second language learners, which currently receives a wider acceptance in the literature of error analysis (EA). According to Adjemian (1976) in Fauziati (2009: 160) there are some characteristics of interlanguage, namely: permeability, systematicity, dynamicity, and fossilization. Three of them related to EFL learners' in learning foreign language.

According to Dulay, et al (1982: 10) states the definition of second language acquisition as the process of learning another language after the basics of the first have been acquired, starting at about five years of age and thereafter. EFL learners' have different stages, for example junior high school level, senior high school level, and university level. Each level produces different structure of target language. As Dulay et al (1982: 11) states that target language refers to the language being learned or taught.

Based on the theory of interlanguage, there are stages as the process of foreign language learner cognitively to determine the L2 structure. The stages are called developmental sequence. In the process of developmental sequence, of course learners produce incorrect grammar. Lightbrun&Spada (1999) in Mahargiani (2015) state that "when grammatically incorrect utterances are made this is believed to show the learner's true level of understanding of the rules and patterns of the L2".

In acquiring English question, it had the development. According to Pienemann, et al., 1988, there are six developmental stages; stage one is single words and formulae. For example: how are you?. Stage two is SVO with rising intonation. For example: the tea is hot?. Stage three is Do-fronting, Wh-fronting, and other fronting. For example: do he work?, what the boy is throwing?, is the boy beside the bus?. Stage four is Pseudo-inversion, Yes/no questions with auxiliary inversion. For example: where is my purse?, have you car?. Stage five is Auxiliary second and Do second. For example: where can he go?, why didn't he understand?. Stage six is Tag questions. For example: He's Polish, isn't he? (Pienemann, et al., 1988).

Based on the explanation above, the objectives of this study was to describe the acquisition of Wh question by EFL students' learning English



as a foreign language: (1) the patterns of question written by the seventh grade students of junior high school. (2) the patterns of question written by the ninth grade students of junior high school. (3) the patterns of question written by the eleventh grade students of senior high school. (4) the development of patterns of question written by the seventh grade students of junior high school, the ninth grade students of junior high school, and the eleventh grade of senior high school.

## **B. Methodology**

The method of this study was qualitative and cross-sectional study. The goal of this study was to describe and explain the pattern, and the development of wh-questions made by the seventh and the ninth grade of junior high school, and eleventh grade of senior high school. The cross-sectional approach is easily to recognizable from the corresponding attributes of quantitative paradigm: obtrusive, controlled measurement (use of artificial tasks), outcome oriented (in that it takes place at only one point in time) and generalizable (larger group of subjects) (Freeman-Larsen, 1991: 12).

The subjects of this study were the seventh grade students of junior high school, ninth grade students of junior high school, and eleventh grade students of senior high school. Each of them consists of 34 students. The source of the data was 30 Indonesian interrogative sentences translated into English by the seventh, ninth, and eleventh grade students in junior high school number one of Sidoharjo and senior high school number one of Sidoharjo.

In analyzing the data, the writer made 30 Indonesian interrogative sentences by using wh-questions. The category of wh question was: what, where, when, why, who, how. The questions consisted of nominal, verbal, and auxiliary sentences. The tenses which used were simple present tense, present continuous tense, simple past tense, and past continuous tense. The writer chose those tense because the students at the seventh grade have not

learnt about perfect tense. The writer asked to the students of the seventh grade to translate 30 Indonesian interrogative sentences into English. This data then categorized as first data. Then the writer asked to the students of the ninth grade to translate 30 Indonesian interrogative sentences into English. This data then categorized as second data. After that the writer asked to the students of the eleventh grade to translate 30 Indonesian interrogative sentences into English. This data then categorized as third data. Three of the data above was as the main data.

The writer classified and categorized all of the data of translation test based on the category in each of subject. Then identify the occurrences of interrogative sentence. To know the patterns of question written by the seventh grade students, the writer took from the dominance pattern. The dominance pattern was the pattern which had the biggest frequency. To know the patterns of question written by the ninth and eleventh grade students, the writer took from the dominance pattern. To categorized the pattern of question written by the seventh grade students, the ninth grade students, and the eleventh grade students, the writer combined the theory of developmental sequence for interrogatives in ESL according to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982: 128), and Freeman-Larsen, (1991: 93).

### C. Result and Finding

The result and finding of this study actually was the answer of the research question in this study. They would be described below.

#### 1. The Patterns of Question Made by the Seventh Grade Students

Based on the result of the research question, the writer found the patterns of question made by the seventh grade students as follow:

From the dominance pattern, the writer pointed out one of patterns with the highest percentage. It was found that the patterns of question written by the seventh grade students: What must I do? “*Wh question + modal auxiliary + S + verb*”. Where Budi usually play football? “*Wh question + unanalyzed do auxiliary + S + verb*”. When Ani usually go to the dentist? “*Wh question*

+ *unanalyzed do auxiliary + S + verb*". Why Ani cry now? "*Wh question + unanalyzed to be + S + verb*". Who is kick the ball? "*Wh question + to be + verb*". How are you can speak English by fluent? "*Wh question + unanalyzed to be + S + modal auxiliary + verb*".

## **2. The Pattern of Question Made by the Ninth Grade Students**

Based on the result of the research question, the writer found the patterns of question made by the ninth grade students as follow:

From the dominance pattern, the writer pointed out one of patterns with the highest percentage. It was found that the patterns of question written by the ninth grade students: What should I do? "*Wh question + modal auxiliary + S + verb*". Where Budi usually plays football? "*Wh question + unanalyzed auxiliary do + S + verb+s/es*". When Ani usually go to the dentist? "*Wh question + unanalyzed do + S + verb*". Why Ani crying now? "*Wh question + unanalyzed to be + S + verb-ing*". Who is kicking the ball? "*Wh question + analyzed to be + verb*". How you can speak English very well? "*Wh question + S + modal auxiliary + verb*".

## **3. The Pattern of Question Made by the Eleventh Grade Students**

Based on the result of the research question, the writer found the patterns of question made by the seventh grade students as follow:

From the dominance pattern, the writer pointed out one of patterns with the highest percentage. It was found that the patterns of question written by the eleventh grade students: What should I do? "*Wh question + modal auxiliary + S + verb*". Where does Budi usually play football? "*Wh question + analyzed auxiliary do + S + verb*". When does Ani usually go to the dentist? "*Wh question + analyzed auxiliary do + S + verb*". Why is Ani crying now? "*Wh question + analyzed to be + S + verb*". Who is kicking

the ball? “*Wh question + analyzed to be + S + verb*”. How you can speak English eloquent? “*Wh question + S + modal auxiliary + verb*”.

#### 4. The Developmental of Patterns of Question Made by the Seventh Grade Students, the Ninth Grade Students, the Eleventh Grade Students

Based on the dominance pattern of question written by the seventh grade students, the ninth grade students, and the eleventh grade students, the writer focused on the pattern which pointed out the development. The comparison of the development of pattern of question written by the seventh grade, the ninth grade, and the eleventh grade students showed in *Table 4*.  
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No.	The Pattern of Question		
	Seventh Grade	Ninth Grade	Eleventh Grade
	(wh question + subject + verb)	(wh question + unanalyzed to be + S + verb)	(wh question + analyzed to be + S + verb)
1	Where Budi usually <b>play</b> football?	Where Budi usually <b>plays</b> football?	Where <b>does</b> Budi usually <b>play</b> football?
2	Where Jimmy <b>eat</b> now?	Where Jimmy <b>eating</b> now?	Where <b>is</b> Jimmy <b>eating</b> now?
3	Where my mother <b>cooking</b> the beef?	Where is my mother <b>will cooking</b> the beef?	Where my mother <b>will cook</b> this beef?
4	Why Anicry now?	Why Anicrying now?	Why <b>is</b> Anicrying now?
5	Who <b>is come</b> late yesterday?	Who <b>is came</b> late yesterday?	Who <b>came</b> late yesterday?

To analyze the developmental patterns of question written by the Seventh, ninth, and eleventh grade students, the writer combined the theory according to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982: 128) and Freeman-Larsen (1991: 93). Based on the data of the table above, the writer concluded that there were three stages of the development patterns of question written by the seventh grade student, the ninth grade students, and the eleventh grade students. The development of pattern would be explained below:  
Stage two: Uninverted WH (+/- aux.). “wh question + S + verb”. Step three: The early auxiliaries. “wh question + unanalyzed to be + S + verb”. Stage four: The learner reaches the full target system. “wh question + analyzed to be + S + verb”.

#### **D. Discussion**

The writer would compare the result of this study with the previous studies and the underlying theory. Based on the analysis, the writer found that the findings of this current study had similarities and differences with previous studies, as described below.

The first result from the previous studies was by Lee (2012). The similarities appeared that in both of the findings of this current study and this previous study. The first similarity was still finding *incorrect word order*. Hong Kong ESL learner's transfer problem and their Chinese interference with word order, perhaps because of L1 transfer, the literary translation from Cantonese (e.g., Why she is so popular, Why you don't correct this?). Whereas the example of incorrect word order in this current study was “When you will pass national examination?”, Why the students must drawing a scenery?”, “where my mother will cook this beef?”. When comparing with the theory of Dulay et al (1982: 128) the incorrect word order was in step 2. According to them, a typical Step 2 question is “What she is doing”. The correct pattern was copula be should appear before subject. Whereas, Pieneman et al (1988) state that the incorrect word order was in Stage 3, namely Wh-fronting. According to Pieneman et al (1988), a

typical Stage 3 question is “What the boy is throwing”. The second similarity was Hong Kong students’ unfamiliarity with English verb phrase structures, and their confusion over the verbs *be* and *do* (e.g., \*What is Mis Wong say? \*Where are Mr Tang Have lunch? \*How far your home to school?). Hong Kong Learners’ difficulty with the interrogative construction is compounded by the fact that Chinese verbs, unlike English verbs, do not have verbal inflections for number, person or tense. This case also occurred in this current study. The students’ pattern was influenced by Interlanguage. It was known that there was no inversion of word, verbs, and verbal inflections for number, person or tense in Indonesian pattern. Whereas the example of unfamiliarity with English verb phrase structures in this current study was “What is they eat in the canteen?”, “Where does my red hat?”, “Where are you buy this watermelons yesterday?”. When comparing with the theory by Pienemann et al (1988) that phenomenon was at Stage 3 namely Do-fronting with an example: Do he work?. It means that the learner cannot apply verb inflection.

The second result from the previous studies was by Abdolamanafi (2012). The difference was the result of experimental method in this previous study stated that the acquisition of question between native and non-native of English were really different. Based on the calculation by using statistical analysis, the non-native of English was more difficult in obtaining on six different types of multiple wh-questions. In this case appear an interlanguage. As based on Fauziati (2009: 157) writes that interlanguage is a study on the language of the second language learners, which currently receives a wider acceptance in the literature of error analysis (EA). It meant that that the non-native of English was called a second or foreign language learner. So they tend to produce more error than native of English. Sharwood Smith (1994: 7) in Fauziati (2009: 159) also states the recognition of interlanguage as systematic rules who explicitly defines IL as “the systematic linguistic behavior of learners of a second or other language; in other words, learners of non-native language”. Hasebe and Maki (2014) in

their study propose that first and second language acquisition are similar, and that second language learners utilize language input in order to construct a grammar to understand and produce the learning language. The similarity between two of these studies was the level of grade and proficiency has any effect in writing question. As Fauziati (2009: 162) states that the learner may be viewed as progressing along a continuum from zero knowledge of L2 to a level closely resembling the linguistic competence of the native speaker of the TL.

The third result from the previous studies was Almacioğlu (2013). The result in this previous study showed that the potential age between nine-Preschool Turkish Children differences gave an influence in Production and Comprehension Phases among the yes/no (mI) and various wh-question types. This study employed an experimental method. In the Production experiment, the responses were analyzed by using semantic score. In the Comprehension experiment, the responses were scored according to the procedures outlined by Tyack and Ingram (1977). Whereas, in this current study the writer combined the theory based on Dulay et al (1982: 128) and Freeman-Larsen (1991: 93). Based on the calculation from their scores, found that the correct answer increased from the age 2.0 to 4.8. The result also showed that yes/no (mI) was easier to produced and comprehend than various wh-question. It was supported by Ervin-Trip (1970)reports that the developmental sequence with which children correctly respond to questions is yes-no, what, where, whose, whom, who, why, how, and when. Whereas in this current study found that the development of pattern of question was in three stages, namely stage 2, step 3, and stage 4. Then the similarity between the finding of this previous and current study was the frequency of correct answers increased with the age of subjects.

The fourth result from the previous studies was Hasebe and Maki (2014). The difference of this previous study focused on the acquisition of *yes/no* and *wh* interrogative constructions in English by 259 Japanese junior high school EFL learners. The writer found that all participants showed

statistically significant differences between the *yes/no* interrogative construction and each type of the *wh*-interrogative construction ( $F(4.253)+36.86$ ,  $p<.001$ ). For them, it was more difficult to acquire the *wh*-interrogative construction than the *yes/no* interrogative construction. Hasebe and Maki's study was similar with Almacioğlu's study. In this case, the subject of the research produced *yes/no* interrogative construction easier than produced the *wh*-interrogative construction.

The fifth result from the previous studies was Galbat and Maleki (2014). Considering to the impact of language background in L3 acquisition, the findings of the current study resulted in the conclusion that bilingualism makes no significant advantage in 3rd language acquisition. This seems that the bilingual learners may not take full advantage of their discrete language background as their performance was not more important than that of the mono-lingual learners. The results of this research elucidated that the L3 and L2 learners' presentation were constant and the L3 learners did not act drastically higher than the mono-lingual learners even though their first language, Arabic, shared [+wh] with English. Finally, it can be claimed that there is no significant difference between Persian-Arab bilinguals (L1 Arabic, L2 Persian) and Persian monolinguals (L1 Persian) in the acquisition of *wh*-question movements in English. But significant differences were found between performances of the elementary L2 & L3 learners and the performance of the intermediate mono-lingual and bilingual learners.

The sixth result from the previous studies was Lee (2014). The similarity between this previous and this current study was both of them applied the same method, namely cross-sectional study. The difference was the result of this previous study showed that students' acquisition of *wh* question by eight participants who had L1 Mongolian, L2 Russian, and L3 English in orally was the participants *somehow* selected the linguistic option that is available in natural languages, but not available in their L1 Mongolian and L2 Russian. More specifically, when the position of the



meaningful wh-word in LD wh-question that is spelled-out varies among L1, L2, and L3, a linguistic curiosity invited us to contemplate whether L3 draws on a strategy from L1 or L2 or directly exploits L3 via UG. Whereas in this current study focused on the acquisition in writing form.

The seventh result from the previous studies was Morishita and Harada (2015). The findings of analysis in converting visually and aurally presented statement sentences into wh question by 116 Japanese university EFL learners' were summarized into three stages: in the first stage, statement sentences were visually presented and students reproduced them or converted them into wh-questions, in the second stage, statement sentences and wh-questions were aurally presented and students reproduced them, and in the third stage, statement sentences were aurally presented and students reproduced them or converted them into wh-questions. In general, as far as Japanese EFL learners are concerned, that it would be more difficult to handle aural presentation than visual presentation and to convert statement sentences into wh-questions than to reproduce sentences just presented.

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