

QUESTION FORMS  
IN  
SPOKEN MALAYSIAN ENGLISH

INDIRA A/P V.P. GOVINDAN

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER  
OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

FACULTY OF LANGUAGE AND LINGUISTICS  
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA  
KUALA LUMPUR

December 2008

## ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of question forms in Malaysian English, in particular the type of structures used in an informal speaking context and the extent to which the respondents used these structures in comparison to standard question forms. The respondents who were dominant speakers of English comprised a group of Malaysians of South Indian descent between the ages of 15-18 years who are living in urban areas.

Four question-types were studied via a structured questionnaire and they were *yes/no* questions, *wh* questions, tag questions and questions in the indirect form. The particles and their function in these utterances were also analysed. The findings suggest that the non-standard forms were more prominent in most of the question types except for *wh* questions. Certain particles (for example *ah* and *eh*) were more evident in particular types of questions. Particles were instrumental in identifying an utterance as a question in *yes/no* questions and their role varied according to the question types.

Finally, test scores of the four question forms revealed that the respondents were able to identify and use the standard forms in *wh* questions and *yes/no* questions but not in tag and indirect questions. Almost all the respondents were unable to produce standard forms in the questions in the indirect form of questions. These variations from the standard could be due to the influence of the other languages they are exposed to.

## ABSTRAK

Kajian ini meneliti soalan-soalan Bahasa Inggeris dalam ME (Malaysian English) khasnya dikalangan khasnya struktur soalan-soalan yang digunakan semasa interaksi secara lisan yang tidak formal serta sejauh mana responden-responden tersebut menggunakan struktur ini berbanding dengan struktur standard. Responden dalam penyelidikan ini pula terdiri daripada mereka yang menggunakan Bahasa Inggeris secara dominant (dominant speakers of English) dan berbangsa India (mempunyai asal usul di selatan India) serta dalam lingkungan umur antara 15-18 tahun dan bermastautin di kawasan bandar.

Empat jenis soalan yang di kaji menggunakan kajian soalselidik adalah soalan *wh*, soalan 'yes/no', soalan 'tag' dan soalan 'indirect'. Peranan partikel (sebagai contoh *eh* dan *ah*) dalam soalan berbentuk lisan juga dikaji. Didapati struktur soalan yang tidak 'standard' sering digunakan dalam kebanyakan jenis soalan kecuali untuk soalan *wh*. Penggunaan sesuatu partikel dalam soalan *yes/no* boleh dihubungkan dengan jenis soalan. Partikel didapati instrumental untuk mengenalpasti struktur sesuatu 'utterance' itu adalah berbentuk soalan dan fungsinya berbeza mengikut jenis soalan.

Keputusan ujian keempat-empat jenis soalan menunjukkan yang responden boleh menggunakan struktur soalan yang 'standard' dalam soalan *yes/no* dan soalan *wh* tetapi bukan dalam soalan 'tag' ataupun soalan berbentuk "indirect". Variasi yang berbeza dari 'standard' mungkin disebabkan oleh pengaruh bahasa-bahasa lain yang mereka terdedah kepada.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Completing this dissertation was truly a memorable and unforgettable six year journey with its ups and downs. There was many a time that I contemplated giving up but some divine force kept propelling me forward slowly and surely toward the light at the end of the tunnel. It has certainly been a test of perseverance and dedication for me personally and I discovered many a good friend and helping hand which kept me going.

First and foremost I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Stefanie Pillai for her invaluable help, patients and guidance without which this dissertation would not have been possible. Her empathy for my trials and tribulations as a mother, teacher and student coupled with her continuous encouragement was instrumental in my completion of this dissertation.

I would like to thank my friends especially Shylaja, Najwa and Sundari who have been a constant source of encouragement and help all along the way.

I would also like to express my appreciation to my family; especially my girls, my husband and my mother-in-law who have truly been my pillar of strength during the most trying times.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to my guru Sri Mataji Nirmala Devi, for giving me the strength, endurance and to show me the way to truth. Jai Shree Mataji!

TABLE OF CONTENTS		PAGE
ABSTRACT		ii
ABSTRAK		iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT		iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS		v-vii
LIST OF FIGURES		viii
LIST OF TABLES		ix
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS		x
 CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION		
1.0	Background	1
1.1	The Current Status of English in Malaysia	1
1.2	Language and Identity	4
1.3	The Use of English Among the Malaysian Indian Community	5
1.4	Statement of the Problem	5
1.5	The Rationale of the Study	6
1.6	Objectives of the Study	6
1.7	Significance of the Study	7
1.8	Limitations of the Study	8
1.9	Overview of the Dissertation	8
 CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW		
2.	Introduction	9
2.1	Role and Status of English	9
2.2	Standard English	12
2.3	Malaysian English	13
2.4	Question forms in Standard English	17
2.4.1	<i>Yes/no</i> Questions	17
2.4.2	<i>Wh</i> questions	20
2.4.3	Questions in the Declarative Form	22
2.4.4	Tag Questions	23
2.4.4.1	Negative tag Questions	23
2.4.4.2	Positive tag Questions	24
2.4.5	Questions in Indirect Form	25
2.5	Question Forms in Malaysian English	28
2.5.1	<i>Wh</i> Questions in ME	28
2.5.2	<i>Yes/no</i> Questions in ME	31
2.5.3	Tag Questions in ME	33
2.5.4	The Use of Particles	35
2.5.5.	Variations in Indirect Questions in ME	36

2.6	Question Forms in Other Varieties of English	37
2.6 I	Non Inversion in <i>yes/no</i> Questions	38
2.6.2	Ellipsis of the Auxiliary	39
2.6.3	Non Standard use of Tags	40
2.6.4	Non Inversion in Indirect Questions	41
2.7	Methodology on Eliciting Data	42
2.8	Conclusion	43

### CHAPTER 3 MATERIALS AND METHOD

3.0	Introduction	45
3.1	Preliminary study	45
3.2	Target Group (TG)	49
3.3	The Personal Questionnaire	52
3.3.1	The Structure of the Personal Questionnaire	52
3.4	The Structured Questionnaire	53
3.4.1	Implementation of the Structured Questionnaire	56
3.4.2	Analysis of the Structures Questionnaire	56
3.4.3	Categorising Non Standard Structures	57
3.5	The Test	58
3.5.1	The Structure of the Test	59
3.5.2	Analysis of the Answers to Test	59
3.6	Conclusion	61

### CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.0	Introduction	62
4.1	Profile of the Respondents	62
4.2	Results of the Structured Questionnaire	65
4.2.1	<i>Wh</i> Interrogatives	66
4.2.1.1	Omission of the Auxiliary verb	67
4.2.1.2	<i>Wh</i> not in the Frontal Position	68
4.2.1.3	Non-Standard use of Tenses	69
4.2.1.4	The use of Particles in <i>wh</i> Questions	71
4.2.1.5	Discussion of the Formation of <i>wh</i> Questions	72
4.2.2	<i>Yes/no</i> Interrogatives Beginning With <i>is/are</i>	74
4.2.2.1	Ellipsis of the Copula and Prodrop	76
4.2.2.2	Non Inversion of the Subject and Auxiliary	77
4.2.2.3	Responses that were not <i>yes/no</i> Questions	78
4.2.2.4	The use of Particles in <i>yes/no</i> Questions Beginning With <i>is/are</i>	79
4.2.2.5	Discussion of the results of <i>yes/no</i> Questions Beginning With <i>is/are</i>	80
4.2.3	<i>Yes/no</i> Questions Beginning With <i>has/have</i>	83
4.2.3.1	Omission of The Auxiliary and Pro-drop	84
4.2.3.2	Non-standard Use of Tenses	85
4.2.3.3	Responses That Were Omitted	86

4.2.3.4	Use of Particles	86
4.2.3.5	Discussion of the Results	87
4.2.3.6	Comparison of the responses in <i>yes/no</i> Questions Beginning With <i>is/are</i> and <i>has/have</i>	90
4.2.4	Tag Questions	92
4.2.4.1	Negative Tag Questions	92
4.2.4.1.1.	Non-Standard Responses With Negative tag Questions	93
4.2.4.1.2	Responses That Were not Accepted as Negative Tag Questions	95
4.2.4.2	Positive Tag Questions	98
4.2.4.2.1	Non-Standard Positive Tags	98
4.2.4.2.2	Responses That Were Not Accepted as Negative Tag Questions	101
4.2.4.3	Comparison Between Positive and Negative Tag Questions	103
4.2.5	Questions in the Indirect Speech	105
4.3	Summary of Question Forms	108

## CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF THE TEST

5.1	Introduction	111
5.2	Results of the Test	111
5.2.1	<i>Wh</i> Questions	112
5.2.2	<i>Yes/no</i> Questions	112
5.2.3	Tag Questions	113
5.2.4	Indirect Forms in Questions	114
5.3	Summary	115

## CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

6.0	Introduction	119
6.1	Summary of Findings	119
6.2	Implications of the Study	121
6.3	Recommendation for Future Research	121
6.4	Conclusion	122

REFERENCES	124
------------	-----

## APPENDIX 1

## APPENDIX 2

## APPENDIX 3

## APPENDIX 4

	LIST OF FIGURES	PAGES
1.1	Status of English in Malaysia	4
2.1	Lectal Cline of Malaysian English	15
2.2	Structure of <i>Yes/No</i> Questions	17
2.3	<i>Yes/No</i> Questions Beginning with Modals	19
2.4	Structure of <i>wh</i> Questions	21
2.5	Structure of Questions in Declarative Forms	22
2.6	The Different Forms in Direct and Indirect Questions	27
2.7	Difference in SE and ME tag Questions	33
2.8	Direct and Indirect Question Forms in SE and ME	37
4.1	Gender and the Age of Respondents	63
4.2	Language Used by Respondents with Parents and Friends	64
4.3	Language Used by Respondents in Everyday Activities	65
4.4	Individual Responses to <i>wh</i> Questions	74
4.5	Individual Responses in <i>yes/no</i> Questions Beginning with <i>is/are</i>	83
4.6	Individual Responses in <i>yes/no</i> Questions Beginning with <i>has/have</i> and the Auxiliary <i>did</i>	88
4.7	Individual Responses in Negative Tag Questions	97
4.8	Individual Responses in Positive Tag Questions	103
4.9	Individual Responses in Indirect Questions	106
5.1	Function of Question Forms of ME	117



	LIST OF TABLES	PAGES
4.1	The Use of Particles in <i>wh</i> Questions	72
4.2.	The Use of Particles in Verbal <i>yes/no</i> Questions Beginning with the Auxiliary <i>is/are</i>	81
4.3	The Use of Particles in Verbal <i>yes/no</i> Questions Beginning with the Auxiliary <i>has/have</i>	89
4.4	A Comparison of Verbal Responses to <i>yes/no</i> Questions Beginning with the Auxiliary <i>is/are</i> and the Auxiliary <i>has/have</i>	91
4.5	A Comparison of Responses to Positive and Negative tag Questions	104
4.6	Results of the Verbal Response of Indirect Speech in Questions	106
5.1	Respondents written Test Scores on Questions	111
5.2	Comparison of Response to the Structured Questionnaire and the Written Test	116

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AE	American English
ASEAN	All South East Asian Nations
CME	Colloquial Malaysian English
DSE	Dominant Speaker of English
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ENL	English as a Native Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
L1	First Language
ME	Malaysian English
MT	Mother Tongue
SE	Standard English
SME	Standard Malaysian English
SSE	Standard Singapore English
TG	Target Group