CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces (1.1) the background of the study with respect to UG and its application in SLA, (1.2) statement of the problem, (1.3) objectives of the study, (1.4) scope of the study, (1.5) definitions of terms, (1.6) significance of the study, and (1.7) organization of the study.

1.1 BACKGROUND

1.1.1   Universal Grammar (UG)

It has always been a question as to how language learners acquire the system of their L1. One of the theoretical models that have been widely held among researchers is the Generative Model, which was proposed by Noam Chomsky in 1980. According to this model, a child acquires his/her L1 via the presence of Universal Grammar (UG), which is activated when it interacts with the linguistic input.

UG consists of two main components: principles and parameters. Principles are invariant and hold in all languages. Parameters are also universal, but unlike principles, they are choices that are available, and different languages choose different choices.

1.1.2   UG and SLA

UG has been tested not only in the research in L1 acquisition but also in L2 acquisition. The areas that have been studied include among others the Wh-movement, Binding principles, the null subject parameter, and the argument structure.

Relative clauses, questions with relative clauses, and questions with structure-dependency violations were employed in the study of Cook (2000) to observe six different L1 learners' and 35 native speakers of English' accessibility of UG with respect to the syntactic movement for questions. The results indicated that subjects know structure-dependency regardless of whether their first languages have syntactic movement. The groups that had movement (Finnish, Polish, Dutch) and those that did not (Japanese, Chinese, Arabic) did have significant differences for structure-dependency. Structure-dependency is active in all L2 learners, though there is some

residual effect from the L1 for whatever reason. L2 users know a principle of Universal Grammar which they have not acquired from explicit teaching.

Sadighi et al (2004) conducted a study examining the development of preposition pied-piping and preposition stranding in the interlanguage grammar of 80 Iranian participants at three proficiency levels and specifically focused on null-prep constructions in the participants' grammar. The results showed that at the beginning, the Iranian EFL learners accessed to UG with respect to the targeted verbs; however, systematic and strong evidence of null-prep in both interrogatives and relative clauses across the two complement types were exhibited.

Ying (2005) investigated the accessibility of UG in terms of the interpretation of reconstruction of noun phrases and predicate fronted sentences with the 'self' in Chinese with twenty-seven English-speaking learners of Chinese and twenty native speakers of Chinese. The results based on the study revealed that L2 English-speaking learners of Chinese had knowledge of its ambiguity inside a moved predicate and lack of its ambiguity inside a moved noun phrase when they bound the word 'self' in Chinese in non-movement sentences to an embedded subject. This indicated that they mapped the narrower setting of reflexives in English onto a wider parameter setting of 'self' in Chinese even though this internal structure does not directly exist in English, and that the accessibility of UG was supported by the study.

Banka (2006) studied how the null subject parameter would be acquired by Hungarian learners of English. The acquisition of syntactic properties incorporated under a general principle of the null subject parameter from the parameter resetting perspective was investigated. Hungarian L2 learners of English were examined to see whether they were capable of resetting the parameter from the L1 [+null subject] value to the L2 [-null subject] value when the parameters in their L1 and L2 were the same. It was revealed that problems in the process of L2 acquisition occurred, and that might result in transfer errors.

Frisch and Friederici (2008) reported L2 learners' availability of UG through a grammaticality judgment test of sentences with either a violated argument structure or violated selectional restrictions against 16 subjects. Sentences in which the verb preceded its arguments by adding a sentence adverbial were read by the subjects to determine whether the judgment was dependent on the position or the syntactic

category of the target. The results suggested that semantic and argument structure information involved similar processes. Moreover, an inaccurate matching between the number of verb and NP arguments led to an improvement of phrase structure when the processing of verb information either preceded or followed the processing of argument information.

These are the studies employing Wh-movement, Binding principles, the null subject parameter, and the argument structure to examine L2 learners' accessibility of Universal Grammar. As it is obvious that the availability of UG can be assessed by the internal phrase structure of the grammatical system, this study was designed and conducted to precisely serve this need in the SLA literature. In this study, Thai learners' judgments on complements and adjuncts in English simple sentences were examined.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In spite of the fact that the internal X-bar hierarchical structure at the base component of the grammatical system like complements and adjuncts is more straightforward to access to UG than other parameters, studies that have been done on this aspect are still small in number. Consequently, the distinction of both of them should be revealed so that the significance of the accessibility to UG through these constituents can be understood.

As there are a plenty of definitions of complement and adjunct structures in the grammatical principles, in this study, a complement refers to an accusative case of a noun phrase functioning as a direct object in a simple sentence. All of these direct objects follow transitive verbs.

With respect to an adjunct, a locative PP or a prepositional phrase, specifying a location in which an event takes place, is employed in the study. All of them modify a motion verb, and they are all postverbal in position.

Within the framework of generative grammar, the distinction of complements and adjuncts should be discussed in two perspectives: syntactic and semantic.

In terms of syntactic perspectives, an adjunct is optional while a complement is obligatory. Therefore, the sentence with the lack of 'Y' as an adjunct is

grammatical while the sentence with the lack of 'Y' as a complement is ungrammatical.
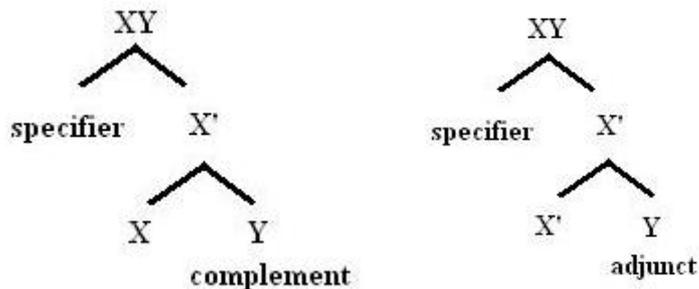

According to the pictures above, an adjunct is a sister of X', daughter of X' while a complement is a sister of X, daughter of X'.

When a complement and an adjunct accompany the same head, the complement is usually closer to the head with the adjunct outside the complement.
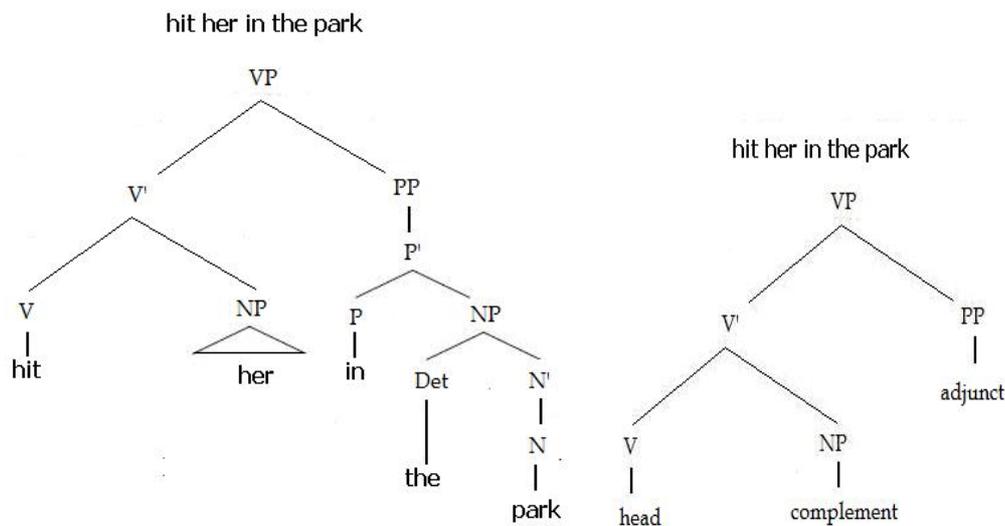
In reference to semantic perspectives, an adjunct modifies the meaning of its head while a complement completes the meaning of the head. If the constituent PP is an adjunct of a VP, the meaning of VP with PP has the same logical type as that of VP, and PP only confines VP with PP to a proper subset of the meaning or denotation of VP alone.
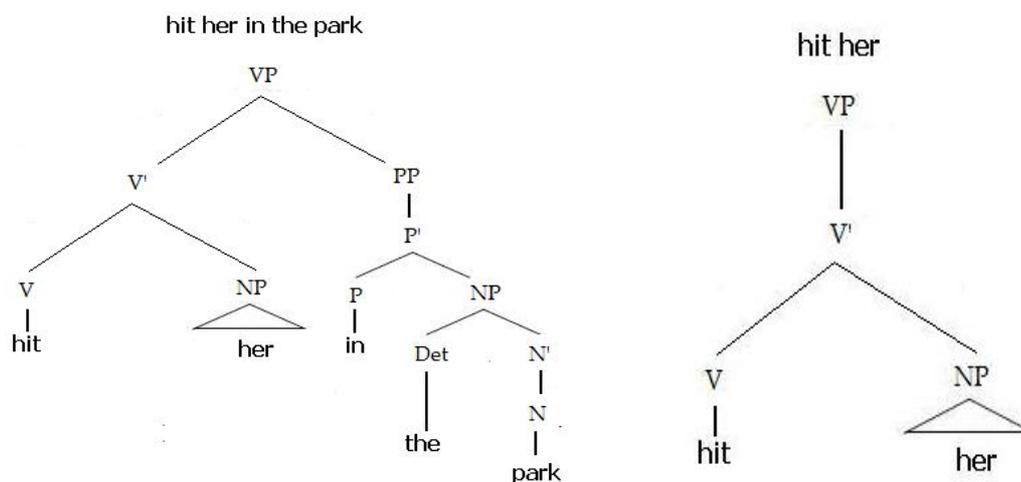
When NP is a complement of a VP, the meaning of VP without NP is incomplete or incoherent even when that VP contains an adjunct PP.
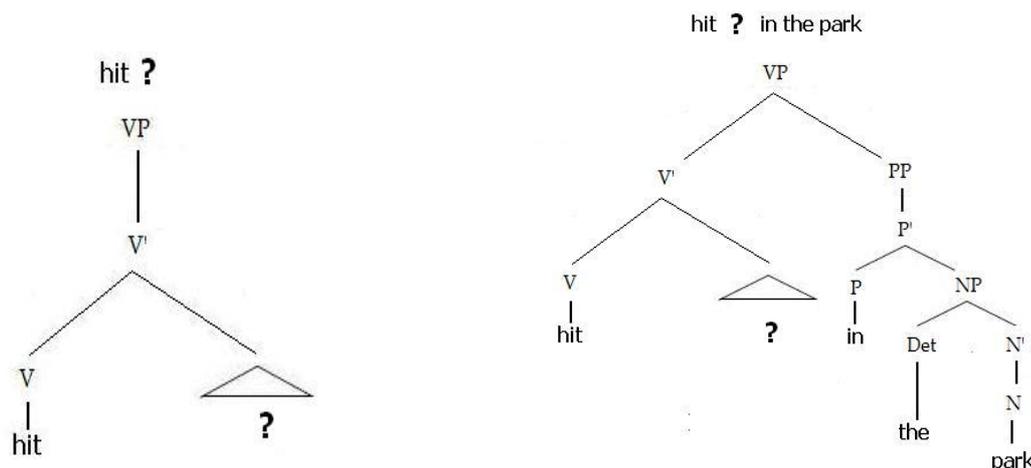
According to the information above, complements and adjuncts are different. The study of L2 learners' judgment on both of these structures is helpful to essentially assists investigators to observe L2 learners' accessibility of UG.

Consequently, this study was conducted to analyze Thai learners' judgment on complements and adjuncts in the form of noun phrases and locative prepositional phrases respectively, when they appear in simple declarative and interrogative sentence (see section A for sentence types). In this study, the following questions were asked:

1.2.1 Are subjects able to judge complement structures more accurately than they are to judge adjunct structures?

1.2.2 Is judgment on Yes and No interrogatives irrespective of the complement and adjunct status less accurate than judgment on declaratives?

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were as follows:

1.3.1 To determine if subjects are able to judge complement structures more accurately than they are to judge adjunct structures. In this theoretical framework, a complement is obligatory, or required by the head, while an adjunct is the modifier of the head, and it is optional. The absence of a complement should be more obvious or easy to notice than the absence of an adjunct.

1.3.2 To identify if judgment on interrogatives, irrespective of the complement and adjunct status, is less accurate than judgment on declaratives. According to the principle that the interrogatives in Thai employ question particles instead of auxiliaries, the Subject/Aux Inversion in main verb Yes/No questions and the raise of past tense to C via I-to-C movement after the insertion of I might be an obstacle to the learners' judgment. The learners should then be able to detect the complement and adverbs in declaratives more easily than ones in interrogatives.

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Definitions of terms of this study are as follows:

1.4.1 Adjuncts refers to the locative prepositional phrases or the groups of words consisting of a preposition functioning as the head and a noun phrase or pronoun functioning as the complement of the preposition. In this study, they are optional constituents typically used to specify location in which an event takes place.

1.4.2 Complements, in this study, refers to noun phrases consisting of an optional determiner and a head noun, and they can also substitute for a noun. They are specific grammatical functions bearing a close semantic relation to their heads.

1.4.3 Judgment refers to subjects' ability to determine complement and adjunct types of sentences through the grammaticality judgment test provided by the researcher.

1.4.4 Thai learners refers to 20 eighth graders, 20 tenth graders and 20 twelfth graders who were studying at Assumption College, Bangkok, Thailand, in the academic year 2008.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.5.1 This study was conducted with 20 eight graders, 20 tenth graders and 20 twelfth graders who were studying at Assumption College, Bangkok, Thailand, in the academic year 2008. The total number of subjects was 60.

1.5.2 This study aimed at investigating Thai learners' judgment on complements and adjuncts in simple declarative and interrogative sentences.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1.6.1 This study aimed to reveal Thai learners' intuition on the internal hierarchical structure of the syntactic constituents of the grammatical system with respect to complements and adjuncts in simple declaratives and interrogatives.

1.6.2 This study aimed to precisely serve needs in the SLA literature by investigating the accessibility of UG.

1.6.3 The findings of the study would be beneficial for both teachers and students in ESL and EFL, and might encourage them to have deeper understanding of these constituents in English sentence structures.

1.6.4 This study would pave a way towards further research in second language acquisition to deal with how to investigate students' accessibility of UG using the internal phrase structure of the grammatical system.

1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions, objectives of the study, scope of the study, definitions of terms, significance of the study and organization of the study. Then the second chapter reviews literature and research studies relevant to this study. The third chapter provides the methodology employed in conducting this study, including the subjects, the materials, the procedures used in the collection of data and the data analysis. The fourth chapter presents the obtained

data and the results of the study. Finally, the fifth chapter contains the conclusions of the study, discussion of the findings, and recommendations for further research.