This study offers new data regarding child L2 acquisition of English wh-questions. Previous studies have shown that English-speaking children go through developmental stages in the acquisition of wh-questions. Initially, auxiliary verbs are omitted and at later stages, these children use auxiliary verbs albeit irregularly. Similar results were reported in some child L2 studies but thus far, these have mostly involved children whose L1 are SVO and, to a lesser extent, SOV languages. The current data was taken from children whose L1 is Cebuano-, a verb-initial (V1) language. While Cebuano-speaking children know wh-movement through their L1, they have yet to acquire subject auxiliary inversion (SAI), a derivational process that is non-existent in Cebuano. To test whether these children have acquired SAI, 33 students aged 6 to 9 were randomly selected from grades 1 to 3 classes at a primary school in the Philippines to participate in a role-playing task. The task made use of pictures containing objects that were covered. The participants received prompts to form English wh-questions based on the pictures. Results show that Cebuano-speaking children had no difficulty with SAI in general. However, a different type of syntactic error was uncovered in the data. All 3 groups failed to produce more than half of the target object wh-questions and produced subject wh-questions even when the context required object wh-questions. At first, these were interpreted as non-parallel development in which Cebuano-speaking children fail at producing object wh-questions but a contrastive structural analysis of Cebuano and English reveals that the learners have applied L1 rules which resulted into an overproduction of subject wh-questions, the only type of wh-question permitted by the L1 grammar.

Keywords: English, L1 transfer, subject-auxiliary inversion, Cebuano, wh-question.