

The Role of L1 Transfer in the L2 Acquisition of English Double Object Constructions

This paper investigates the acquisition of the English Double Object (DO) constructions by Korean-speaking adult learners of English, and suggests that the L1-transfer plays a crucial role in acquiring the prospective possessor constraint associated with English DOs.

Differences between English DOs and Korean DOs. It has been argued that English DOs encode the notion of a (prospective) HAVE relation: the referent of the first object is intended to possess the referent of the second object (cf. Bresnan 1978; Harley 1995, Pesetsky 1995, Pinker 1989, Mazurkewich & White 1984). This accounts for the contrast between (1) and (2). The prospective possessor constraint holds for both goal-DOs (3)-(4) and ben(effective)-DOs (5)-(6). This prospective possessor constraint is attributed to the presence of “Irrealis Have” or Applicative head in the DOs, as in (7) (cf. Marantz 1993, den Dikken 1995).

The DO construction also exists in Korean, as evidenced by pronominal variable binding (cf. Lee 1993; Cho 1994): the first object in the DAT-ACC order asymmetrically c-commands the second object. Crucially, despite this structural similarity between Korean DOs and English DOs, there are interesting differences between the two languages, which are most evident in the case of ben-DOs. In Korean, benefactive verbs on their own cannot appear in the DO (8). They can appear in the DOs if and only if the benefactive morpheme *cwu-* is present (9). The ben-DOs in Korean and English are also distinct semantically. The dative-marked DP in Korean ben-DOs denotes a benefactor of the event denoted by the ν P, where the benefactor is not necessarily the possessor (10). Since Korean ben-DOs encode a wider benefactive construal, regardless of prospective possession, Korean allows more verbs to enter ben-DOs than English does (10). In contrast, goal-DOs in Korean respect the prospective possessor constraint, and also require no special morphology (11).

Based on the evidence from the scrambling and adverb placement tests, we show that Korean goal-DOs are structurally comparable to the English goal-DOs (given that the goal in both languages is within the scope of V). However, Korean ben-DOs are structurally distinct from the English ben-DOs because the dative-marked DP in Korean ben-DOs is licensed by the Applicative head (*-cwu*) located ν P externally (thus, the dative-marked DP in Korean ben-DOs is outside the scope of V).

Predictions for Korean-speaking learners of English. The present study was designed to examine whether Korean-speaking adult learners of English show any sensitivity to the prospective possessor constraint of the English DOs and furthermore, whether they treat ben-DOs and goal-DOs differently. Given the striking differences between the ben-DOs in Korean and English, the following predictions are put forth. (1) Since Korean ben-DOs, unlike the English ben-DOs, encode the wider benefactive construal and furthermore, the benefactive is licensed by the ν P external Applicative head, Korean speakers will (at least initially) reject the English ben-DOs (whether licit or illicit) (i.e., negative transfer blocking the ben-DOs in the English grammar of the Korean learners). (2) If Korean speakers develop sensitivity to the prospective possessor constraint, the sensitivity to goal-DOs will emerge earlier than to the ben-DOs, due to the structural and semantic comparability between goal-DOs in Korean and English and this asymmetry between goal- and ben-DOs will (possibly) manifest itself as preference of goal-DOs over ben-DOs.

Methodology. In order to test the above predictions, an interpretation task was used. For each test verb, two contexts were given, only one of which satisfied the prospective possessor constraint (we refer to this property as \pm Poss – see (12)-(13)). When the learners give a response of 3 (somewhat acceptable) or 4 (completely acceptable) for a + Poss context while giving a response of 2 (somewhat unacceptable) or 1 (completely unacceptable), for –Poss context, they are considered to show sensitivity to the prospective possessor constraint. In

order to assess the learners' English proficiency, a cloze test was administered. For comparison, native speakers of English participated in the study as a control group.

Results. The predictions were largely borne out. Sensitivity to the constraint increases as proficiency increases. The beginners did not show any sensitivity to the prospective possessor constraint for either goal-DOs or ben-DOs. Interestingly, they rated –Poss ben-DOs higher than +Poss ben-DOs, which is attributed to the transfer of properties of Korean ben-DOs (note that –Poss ben-DOs (like Korean ben-DOs) encode a benefactive construal, not the possessor one). Some of the low intermediates showed an emerging sensitivity to the prospective possessor constraint. Most of the high intermediates showed sensitivity to the constraint. In the two lower proficiency groups, the learners were more willing to accept +Poss goal-DOs than +Poss ben-DOs, in line with the predictions.

- (1). *John fixed Mary a sandwich.* (✓ As a result, Mary now possesses the sandwich)
- (2). **John fixed Mary a chair.* (# As a result, Mary now possesses the chair)
- (3). Licit goal-DOs: *Tom gave Mary a book.* (✓ As a result, Mary now possesses the book)
- (4). Illicit goal-DOs: **John drove the doctor a patient.* (# As a result, the doctor now possesses the patient)
- (5). Licit ben-DOs: *Sue made the lady a cake.* (✓ As a result, the lady now possesses the cake)
- (6). Illicit ben-DOs: **Bob kept Jane a key.* (# As a result, Jane now possesses the key)

In (1)-(6), the text in parentheses indicates (in)compatibility with the possessor constraint.

(7). [NOM [_v [DAT [H_v [ACC V]]]]]

- (8) John-i (*Mary-eykey) cake-ul kwu-ess-ta.
John-Nom (Mary-Dat) cake-Acc bake-Past-Decl
- (9) John-i Mary-eykey cake-ul kwu-e *(cwu)-ess-ta
John-Nom Mary-Dat cake-Acc bake-L(inker) BEN-Past-Decl
'John baked Mary a cake.'
- (10) John-i Mary-eykey kapang-ul tul-e *(cwu)-ess-ta
John-Nom Mary-Dat bag-Acc hold-L BEN-Past-Decl
'*John held Mary the bag.' (# As a result, Mary now possesses the bag.)
(Mary is benefited from John's holding the bag)
- (11) John-i Mary-eykey chayk-ul ponay-ss-ta. Mary-ka ice ku
John-Nom Mary-Dat book-Acc send-Past-Decl Mary-Nom now the
chayk-uy soyucwu-ka toy-ess-ta.
book-Gen possessor-Nom become-Past-Decl
'John sent Mary a book and Mary is now the possessor of the book.'

(12) **+Poss context**

Rodney was looking for an apartment, but he didn't know the area well, so even after weeks of looking, he didn't see any that he wanted to live in. Finally, he asked his friend Heather to help him look, because he knew she used to be a realtor. Within the week, Heather had one that Rodney liked.

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|---|---|---|---|---|----------|
| A. Heather found Rodney an apartment. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Not sure |
| B. Heather found an apartment for Rodney. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Not sure |

(13) **–Poss context**

Betty's company hired a consultant for a month, and Betty needed to find somewhere for the consultant to stay, but after looking in all the papers, she couldn't find anything. Finally, she asked Peter to help her since she knew Peter knew a lot of the landlords. Within the week, Peter had one that Betty liked. Now the consultant has a place to stay and he will move in next week.

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|--|---|---|---|---|----------|
| A. Peter found Betty an apartment. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Not sure |
| B. Peter found an apartment for Betty. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | Not sure |