Movement and null prep in the L2 acquisition of English double objects
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This study examines the acquisition and representation of the English double object construction, including to-datives and for-datives, and presents evidence for (1) a transformational analysis of English datives, and (2) a syntactic relationship between the dative alternation and the interlanguage phenomenon of null prep, in which obligatory prepositions are omitted in certain contexts (Klein 1993b, 1995a).

There is a long tradition of research in SLA on the acquisition of argument structure alternations (Bley-Vroman & Yoshinaga 1992; Cuervo 2007; Hawkins 1987; Inagaki 1997; Mazerkewich & White 1984; Whong-Barr & Schwartz 2002; Yang & Montrul 2017). Argument structure alternations present a significant acquisitional challenge. There are semantic and morphological restrictions on what kinds of verbs can occur in double object constructions like Mary sent Bill a letter, such as, famously, a restriction against Latinate verbs (*Mary conveyed Bill a message) (Levin, 1993; Pinker 1989). Although lexical semantics are an essential part of accounting for argument structure alternations, Emonds and Whitney (2005) show convincingly that syntactic transformations are still part of the puzzle. This study argues that evidence from second language acquisition can also be brought to bear on longstanding debates in linguistic theory about the representation of argument structure.

Experiment 1 examines the acquisition of syntactic structures derived from datives. The two objects of a double object construction are subject to different grammatical restrictions. Under A'-movement, the theme argument can be extracted while the goal argument cannot (Which essay did the student email the teacher? vs. *Which teacher did the student email the essay?). Under A movement, the goal argument can be extracted while the theme argument cannot (The teacher was emailed the essay by the student vs *The essay was emailed the teacher by the student). Data from a grammaticality judgment task suggest that learners are sensitive to this asymmetry.

Experiment 2 tests a hypothesis that commonly observed interlanguage errors in prepositional structure are systematically related to dative structures by way of the lexicon. A sentence correction task targeting prepositions in questions and relative clauses revealed that even native speakers of English accept null prep more widely than has been noted in previous literature. Although they varied considerably as to which instances of null prep they accepted, native speakers only accepted null prep with verbs that participated in the dative alternation in their own dialects. This finding also revealed a difference between the Chinese and Korean groups. The Chinese group behaved like the native speakers, allowing null prep only with verbs that alternated in their own dialects. The Korean group, although higher in proficiency, did not show such a systematic relationship in their interlanguage between the alternating verbs and the licensing of null prep.