

## **Acquisition of the English Dative Alternation: The *Avoid Synonymy Principle* and the role of indirect negative evidence\***

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This paper proposes that the acquisition of the argument structure alternation (in particular, English dative alternation) is comparable to the acquisition of a paradigm and that once the acquisition of the Argument Structure alternation is considered as the learning of a paradigm, it is guided by the *Avoid Synonymy Principle*: this in turn allows indirect negative evidence to be used by the language learners to acquire the subtle semantic differences between two forms in the alternation. It then provides a theoretical motivation for the proposal. Taking the acquisition of the English dative alternation as a case in point, this paper offers an articulated account of how the proposal works, and further advances the possible sequence of constraints pertaining to the construction.

### **1. Introduction**

An intriguing point about dative verbs in English is that not all dative verbs alternate between the Prepositional Dative form (PP) and the Double Object (DO) form, as exemplified in (1) and (2).

- (1) a. John gave a book to Mary.  
b. John gave Mary a book.
- (2) a. John poured some cement for Mary.  
b.\*John poured Mary some cement.

How do learners of English come to know which verbs alternate, in the absence of (direct and indirect) negative evidence? This learnability problem is called “Baker’s paradox”. The paradox arises from the fact that learners cannot make use of any type of negative evidence. (cf. Baker 1979, Bowerman 1987, Grimshaw and Pinker 1989). Indeed, how can learners discriminate between forms that do not appear in the input but are grammatically possible and those that are not grammatically possible? Furthermore, there is evidence that children do overgeneralize (cf. Bowerman 1982, MacWhinney and White 1985, Gropen et al. 1989). The question then arises as to how children can overcome such overgeneralizations. The same question arises in the context of adult second language (L2) acquisition as well. One principle that some scholars

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have advanced as relevant for the acquisition of Argument Structure alternation (henceforth, AS) is the *Uniqueness Principle* (cf. Wexler and Culicover 1980, Pinker 1984, Clark 1987). Here I will endorse that principle and attempt to articulate how it works and how it guides the acquisition of AS, the English dative alternation in particular.

I advance the claim that the learning the AS is comparable to learning a paradigm, guided by the *Avoid Synonymy Principle* (cf. Carstairs-McCarthy 1998) or *Uniqueness Principle*. More importantly, I argue that in such a case, indirect negative evidence can be used by the learners to acquire the subtle semantic differences between the two forms in the alternation. Taking the English dative alternation (henceforth, DA) as a case in point, we show how DO and PP forms constitute an AS paradigm, bringing attention to constraints pertaining to the DO and PP forms. I then propose a possible sequence of the acquisition of the relevant constraints, and theoretically motivate this sequence.

This paper is organized as follows. In the following section, I consider the issue of how the acquisition of AS in general is acquired and show how the *Avoid Synonymy Principle* guides the acquisition of AS. I then show how DO and PP forms in English DA constitute an AS paradigm. In Section 3, I outline the contexts in which the indirect negative evidence can work and taking English DA as an illustration, I spell out the two contexts where the indirect negative evidence can be relevant and how it aids learners to acquire the construction under discussion. In Section 4, I put forth a possible sequence of the acquisition of the constraints pertinent to the DO and PP forms, which is built upon the theoretical considerations. In the section that follows, I present specific hypotheses and consider the issues to be considered in testing the proposed hypotheses. I then briefly present the results of the study which was designed to test these hypotheses. Section 6 concludes the paper with a discussion of future investigations of the current paper.

## **2. Proposal and Theoretical background**

### **2.1 The *Avoid Synonymy Principle* and the English Dative Alternation.**

Inflectional paradigms are governed by a very general and pervasive acquisition principle known as the *Avoid Synonymy Principle* (Carstairs-McCarthy 1998) or *Uniqueness Principle*, which is presented in (3). Researchers have given various names to this principle (e.g., the *Blocking principle* of Marcus, Pinker, Ulman, Hollander and Xu 1992, the *Elsewhere Condition* of Kiparsky 1973, the *Unique Entry Principle* of Pinker 1984). Nevertheless, the main idea of these learning principles is shared by all of the aforementioned researchers and can be captured as follows. For purposes of presentation, I call it the *Avoid Synonymy Principle*.

- (3) Two distinct forms in a paradigm cannot be associated with the same meaning or information content (Carstairs-McCarthy 1998).

A paradigm consists of related forms with differing grammatical properties. Each form is related to the other forms in the paradigm (morphophonologically or categorically), but each form is semantically distinct from the rest of the forms. Learning a particular form in a paradigm involves learning that the form contrasts in meaning or informational content with the other forms. As a result, a one-to-one form-meaning mapping should be established. Williams (1997) expresses the same idea in terms of specificity, claiming that a notion of specificity is a crucial factor in the acquisition of any paradigm. He argues that it is important to make a distinction in specificity: X is specified in more detail than Y. Put another way, although X and Y are similar in certain ways, crucially, on some point, X is different from Y, having a more specified (or detailed) property.

The acquisition of past tense forms is a good illustration. It has widely been reported that, in the acquisition of past tense forms, children overextend the regular inflectional rule (verb + *ed*) to irregular verbs, producing non target-like forms such as *goed*. Pinker (1984, 1989) advanced the *Avoid Synonymy Principle* in this context to account for how children recover from overgeneralization of the regular inflectional rule. He suggests that hearing the irregular form *went* in a past tense context provides evidence that the regular form *goed* is ill-formed in that a more specific form blocks the application of the regular rule. In other words, the existence of a more specific form indicates that the relatively less specific form cannot have the same meaning. Since no other meaning is available, the more general form (*goed*) cannot exist.

Another domain in which the *Avoid Synonymy Principle* works well is the grammatical person paradigm. Spanish is taken as an example. If a learner knows that *com-o* (I eat) is the 1<sup>st</sup> person singular form and *com-e* (s/he eats) is the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular form in Spanish, and the learner then hears a new but related form, *com-es* (you (sg) eat) in a context where only one person is present, the learner can conclude that this corresponds to the 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular. Learning is successful because the learner pairs up one form to one meaning.

The *Avoid Synonymy Principle* extends to the learning of the AS alternation in that, at a formal level of analysis, learning AS alternation is comparable to learning a paradigm. Just as there can be related but distinct forms in person and gender paradigms, there can also be forms in an AS alternation that are related but semantically distinct, such that one form is more appropriate than the other for a given context. Moreover, sometimes, this subtle meaning difference between the two forms of an alternation ensures that one form but not the other form is allowed in a given context.

With these similarities taken into consideration, I propose that the DO and PP forms of the English DA constitute an AS alternation paradigm (henceforth, the DO-PP paradigm) and that the acquisition of these two forms is guided by the *Avoid Synonymy Principle*, presented in (3). Given the

statement in (3), it must then be case that these two forms are non-synonymous. We turn to this next.

## 2.2 The DO-PP paradigm: Semantic distinction between DO and PP forms

Indeed, research on the grammatical properties of the DO and PP constructions has shown that the two constructions are associated with two distinct meanings (cf. den Dikken 1995, Harley 2002).

The DO construction encodes the prospective possession relation between the two objects. In the DO, the referent of the first DP complement is understood as the prospective possessor of the referent of the second DP complement (whether literally or metaphorically). We refer to this meaning encoded by the DO construction as the (prospective) *possessor* constraint.<sup>1</sup> The possessor constraint accounts for the contrast in (4). An inanimate goal, *New York*, cannot appear in the DO form in that an inanimate goal cannot function as a potential possessor of the referent of the second DP.

On the other hand, the goal PP construction has a ‘physical transfer’ interpretation (cf. Green 1974, Oehrle 1976). Specifically, the goal PP construction is interpreted as transfer of the referent of the theme to a physical location denoted by the PP, as shown by the contrast in (5). That is, the goal argument in the PP construction is uniquely locational. As illustrated in the contrast in (5), the possession relation between goal and theme is a property of DOs, not of the PP forms. We refer to this meaning encoded by the PP construction as the *physical transfer* constraint.

The possessor constraint holds for both goal and benefactive DOs. Benefactive DOs were illustrated in (6). On the other hand, benefactive PP construction is not restricted to the possession relation, encoding a wide benefaction reading and therefore, benefactive PP counterparts of ungrammatical benefactive DOs in (6) are all grammatical.

- (4) a. John sent a letter to Mary/New York.  
 b. John sent Mary/\*New York a letter.  
 (Jackendoff 1990)

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<sup>1</sup> Along with the semantic constraint such as the *possessor* constraint on the DO form, there is a morphological constraint, called *Linate* constraint: native-stem (Germanic) class verbs but not *Linate* class verbs can occur in DOs (cf. Green 1974, Oehrle 1976, Mazurkewich & White 1984, Pinker 1989). With respect to the *Linate* constraint, an idiolectal variation has been well reported. Examples violating the *Linate* constraint are illustrated below. The discussion in this paper is restricted to the DO forms violating the semantic constraint.

(i) \*John reported them the story.

(ii) \*John donated the museum a painting.

(Pinker 1989: 45)

- (5) a. \*John gave a headache to Mary.  
b. John gave Mary a headache.
- (6) a. John fixed Mary a sandwich/ \*a car.  
b. John poured Mary a cup of coffee/\*some cement.  
(Jackendoff 1990)

The semantic distinction between the DO and PP constructions has been attributed to presence (or absence) of a projection, which is present in the DO but absent in the PP. I refer to this projection as the ‘low applicative’ projection (in the sense of Pykkänen 2002). The first DP in the DO structure is in the Spec of an applicative head and the possessor relation between the first DP and the second DP is established via this applicative head.

It has been shown above that DO and PP constructions are semantically distinct. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the two constructions are grammatically related. The verbs in the DO form and in the PP form have the same basic core meaning. The DO construction adds a layer of meaning, namely the meaning of (prospective) possessor (via the applicative head). In other words, DO and PP forms are grammatically related but crucially also semantically different. These dual properties (e.g., related but distinct) of DO and PP forms meet the condition to constitute a paradigm. Then, I reasonably conclude that the DO and PP forms are part of an AS paradigm. Since the DO and PP forms are members of the same paradigm (i.e., the DO-PP paradigm), their acquisition should therefore be guided by the *Avoid Synonymy Principle*.

### **3. Acquisition of the DO-PP paradigm, and the role of indirect negative evidence**

In the preceding section, I have concluded that the acquisition of the DO-PP paradigm is guided by the *Avoid Synonymy Principle*. In this section, I propose that this allows indirect negative evidence (i.e., nonoccurrence of a form in the input; cf. Chomsky 1981) to be used by the learners to acquire the subtle semantic differences between the two forms in the alternation. I elaborate this proposal below.

I hypothesize that the first step in the acquisition of the DO-PP paradigm is to recognize that the DO and PP forms are part of the DO-PP paradigm (i.e., they involve the same lexical verb). Once the learner has recognized that the DO and the PP forms are part of the paradigm, the *Avoid Synonymy Principle* comes into play and the learner can begin to use form-to-meaning contrasts to acquire the subtle meaning differences described in section 2.2. Specifically, the learner, driven by the *Avoid Synonymy Principle*, endeavors to locate the semantic differences between the two forms. Crucially, I hypothesize that at this stage, indirect negative evidence can be used by the learners to acquire the distinct meanings associated with DO and PP forms.

Given this hypothesis, the question arises as to the context in which indirect negative evidence can be utilized.

Obviously, acquisition cannot rely on indirect negative evidence across the board in that there are many forms that are not attested in the input but that learners are nevertheless willing to accept as possible forms. Note that Mazurkewich and White (1984) invoked positive evidence as a source of acquisition of the DO and PP forms and discarded the role of indirect negative evidence, arguing that indirect negative evidence works only in controlled or constrained environments or contexts. At this point, my assumptions that the DO and PP forms constitute the DO-PP paradigm and that this paradigm is guided by the *Avoid Synonymy Principle* come to be relevant. A crucial point here is that indirect negative evidence can be used by the learner *if and only if* it involves the acquisition of form-to-meaning mappings *within a paradigm*, which is guided by the *Avoid Synonymy Principle*; if the DO and PP forms are members of a paradigm, the learner can make use of the nonoccurrence of one member of the alternation in the input to bootstrap the form-to-meaning mapping that distinguishes the two forms in the alternation (i.e., the prospective possessor meaning of the goal argument in the DO form on the one hand, and the purely locational meaning of the goal argument in the goal PP form on the other).

#### **4. A possible sequence of acquisition of the constraints pertinent to the DO-PP paradigm**

Having proposed the context in which the indirect negative evidence can be used, in this section, I outline a possible sequence of the acquisition of the constraints pertaining to the DO-PP paradigm and provide motivation for this proposal. In particular, I propose the sequence of acquisition of the constraints associated with the English dative alternation by Korean speakers.

The acquisition of the DO-PP paradigm can be understood through an examination of a learner's sensitivity to the relevant constraints. Furthermore, the acquisition of constraints associated with the DO and PP forms can give us information about possible steps that learners take in acquiring the DO-PP paradigm in the context of both L1 and L2 acquisition in general. In the context of L2 acquisition, in particular, studies in this domain allow the investigation of additional questions such as (1) how and when L2 learners are able to recover from the negative transfer effects, restructuring the form-to-meaning mappings, and (2) if so, what knowledge can act as a triggering factor in bootstrapping the learners out of these negative transfer effects. The investigation of the latter issue can be done by examining which constraints are known to learners who have already recovered from the negative transfer effects versus learners who still show negative transfer effects.

As was hypothesized in the preceding section, the very first step in the acquisition of the DO-PP paradigm is to recognize that the DO and PP forms

are part of a paradigm. At this stage, learners are still unaware of the target form-to-meaning mapping of DO and PP forms. However, the *Avoid Synonymy Principle* is now at work and this allows indirect negative evidence to be used by the learners to acquire the subtle semantic differences between the two forms of the paradigm.

I hypothesize that the non-existence of inanimate goals in DO forms will be the first piece of indirect negative evidence to be used by the learners in bootstrapping the meaning difference between the DO and PP forms. In other words, this nonoccurrence acts as the triggering factor in bootstrapping form-to-meaning mappings of the DO and PP forms: the acquisition of the (prospective) possession relation between the goal or benefactive argument and the theme argument, which is a unique property of the DO forms.<sup>2</sup> The relevant contrast is presented in (7) and (8).

- (7) a. John sent a letter to Mary.  
b. John sent Mary a letter.
- (8) a. John sent a letter to New York.  
b. \*John sent New York a letter. (Jackendoff 1990)<sup>3</sup>

While (7b) respects the possessor constraint, (8b) violates it. Furthermore, in (7b) but not in (8b), the goal is animate. For purposes of exposition, I use the term *animacy* constraint to describe the contrast in (7) and (8): The DO form in (7b) respects the animacy constraint while the DO form in (8b) violates it. It should be noted that there is no such constraint on the English DO forms.<sup>4</sup> This fact notwithstanding, it is true that in most cases, the

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<sup>2</sup> There is another logically possible alternative: the information about (in)animate goals does not lead to the possessor constraint and learners settle for a much simpler “animacy” constraint, which I define below.

<sup>3</sup> The DO construction with an inanimate goal becomes acceptable if the goal can be taken to denote an animate entity, as in (i) and (ii) below:

(i) France gave some African countries humanitarian aid. (Miyagawa and Tsujioka 2004)

(ii) The revolution gave Rumania a new government. (den Dikken 1995, who attributes the example to Tremblay 1991).

Likewise, sentence (8b) becomes acceptable if *New York* denotes a group of people, such as “The New York office”.

<sup>4</sup> The following legitimate DO sentences are counterexamples to the animacy constraint.

(i) John gave the house a fresh coat of paint.

(ii) John made/got/found/ordered the lamp a new shade.

(iii) John gave/built the house a new roof.

The examples above show that the animacy constraint on the DO does not exist. The possessor constraint is indeed the sole semantic constraint working on the DO construction. Animacy is a natural consequence of the possessor constraint to the extent that the animacy constraint is respected for the DO sentences where the referent

goal argument is animate and as such, it is likely that this salient property can play an important role in bootstrapping the form-to-meaning mapping of the DO form. In other words, the real constraint is possession, but animacy is a side effect.

The justification of this hypothesis that the information about (in)animate goals bootstrap form-to-meaning mappings between DO and PP forms is as follows. In the vast majority of cases, the goal argument in the DO construction is animate, a property that is both salient and robust, so it is reasonable to assume that the distinction illustrated in (7) and (8) will be prominent to the learner early on, becoming the first distinction that the learner acquires. The learner can postulate that inanimate goals always appear in the PP form but not in the DO form of the paradigm. So, the learner will use that piece of information to semantically distinguish the two members of the paradigm. This means that if a learner shows sensitivity to the animacy constraint, this learner is beginning to develop sensitivity to the possessor constraint on the DO form: possession entails animacy for the learners.<sup>5</sup>

Next, we turn to the acquisition of the possessor constraint. With respect to the acquisition of English DO constructions by adult Korean speakers, I hypothesize that the target form-to-meaning mapping is first acquired for goal DOs.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the possessor constraint on goal DOs is acquired before the corresponding constraint on benefactive DOs.

This hypothesis is motivated by the following considerations. First, as reported in Oh and Zubizarreta (2003, 2005, in press a and in press b), the negative transfer effects of the structural properties of Korean benefactive DOs delay the acquisition of English benefactive DOs, leading learners to a blind rejection of English benefactive DOs. I will not be concerned with the detailed findings of Oh and Zubizarreta *op cit.* here, but instead refer the reader to the aforementioned literature, which shows that goal DOs in English and Korean are structurally comparable (i.e., both are low applicatives in the sense of Pylkkänen 2002) while benefactive DOs in the two languages are structurally distinct (benefactive DOs in English are low applicatives while benefactive DOs in Korean are high applicatives) and that this syntactic distinction has a

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of the first object is animate. The animacy constraint is just an illusion created by the fact that in most of the DO sentences, the referent of the first object is animate and that legitimate DO sentences with inanimate goal arguments, such as the ones in (i) and (iii), are relatively very rare.

<sup>5</sup> There is another logically possible alternative. Although I assume a connection between sensitivity to the animacy constraint and sensitivity to the possessor constraint, it is also logically possible that the learner's sensitivity to the animacy constraint might simply reflect the learners' sensitivity to "animacy", without revealing any deep underlying principles, such as the possessor constraint.

<sup>6</sup> I leave open the issue of the acquisition of the possessor constraint by L1 learners and its relative ordering in relation to the acquisition of the other constraints. Here I content myself with the point that the proposed claim is restricted to the acquisition of English DOs by Korean speakers.

clear consequence in acquisition: the structural difference in benefactive DOs in the two languages has a negative effect on the acquisition of English benefactive DOs by Korean speakers. Second, benefactive DOs in Korean and English are semantically distinct: unlike English benefactive DOs, Korean benefactive DOs encode a wide benefactive meaning and are not restricted to the possession relation. As such, (9) is compatible with a meaning in which John baked the cake on behalf of Mary (i.e., Mary benefits from the “John’s baking the cake” but is not the intended recipient of the cake). In such a context, English benefactive DOs are infelicitous.

- (9) John-i Mary-eykey kheyikh-ul kwu-e cwu-ess-ta  
 John-Nom Mary-Dat cake-Acc bake-L Ben-Past-Decl  
 ‘John baked Mary a cake.’

Third, benefactive DOs in English and those in Korean have different ways of encoding DOs; while benefactive DOs in English requires a lexical licensing which doesn’t need any special morphology other than the main verb, benefactive DOs in Korean obligatorily require morphological licensing which needs special morphology other than the main verb, namely a benefactive morpheme *cwu-*. Lastly, the physical transfer constraint on the PP, which is directly relevant in bootstrapping the possessor constraint on the DO (since getting the meaning component of the PP forms helps getting the meaning component of the DO forms, the other member of the same paradigm), is pertinent only to the goal PP forms (and irrelevant to benefactive PP forms); therefore, it is reasonable to assume that if the physical transfer constraint on the goal PP form is acquired, it will be an immediate and direct boost for the acquisition of the possessor constraint for goal DOs rather than benefactive DOs. For ease of reference, the examples illustrating the physical transfer constraint are repeated below.

- (10) a. \*John/the movie gave an idea to Mary.  
 b. John/the movie gave Mary an idea.
- (11) a. \*John gave a kick/a kiss/a hug to Mary.  
 b. John gave Mary a kick/a kiss/a hug.

Given the claim of goal before benefactive, the question arises as to when learners acquire the possessor constraint on benefactive DOs, extending their knowledge of the possessor constraint on goal DOs to benefactive DOs. In an attempt to provide one possible account, I explore the issue of what can be the triggering factor in bootstrapping the form-to-meaning mapping for benefactive DOs. I argue that the acquisition of the physical transfer constraint in conjunction with the acquisition of the possessor constraint on goal DOs bootstrap the target form-to-meaning mapping of benefactive DOs. In this regard, the learner’s sensitivity to the physical transfer constraint can be one

indicator (albeit not a sole factor) of the learner's emerging sensitivity to the possessor constraint on benefactive DOs.

The motivation for this hypothesis is as follows. We first assume that a learner's sensitivity to the physical transfer constraint usually comes in relatively late because this property is not as salient and robust as the animacy constraint. Granting this, the learner's sensitivity to the physical transfer constraint means that this learner is tuned to an extremely subtle semantic distinction. That is, this learner notices that the abstract transfer reading can only be encoded in the DO form (i.e., another type of indirect negative evidence: absence of (10a) and (11a) in the input), and that the PP forms cannot encode the abstract transfer reading. This awareness helps the learners to fully acquire the possessor constraint on the goal DOs. Alternatively, the physical transfer constraint and the possessor constraint on goal DOs are emerging around the same time.

Once the learner is sensitive to possession (on goal DOs), s/he will be sensitive to the property across the constructions. This, in turn, implies that this learner has completed acquiring the DO-PP paradigm. By this time, it is assumed that the learner fully establishes the target form-to-meaning mapping for English benefactive DOs, overcoming the negative transfer effects. By then, the learner reanalyzes English benefactive DOs as low applicative, accepting them.

To summarize, I have advanced a possible sequence for the acquisition of the constraints on DO and PP forms; (1) the animacy constraint is acquired very early on and it bootstraps the possessor constraint on DO forms; (2) the possessor constraint on goal DOs is acquired before the corresponding constraint on benefactive DOs; and (3) awareness of the possessor constraint on goal DO and the physical transfer constraint on goal PPs bootstrap the possessor constraint on benefactive DOs. The final point suggests that awareness of the subtle but distinct semantics associated with goal DO and PP forms helps learners to overcome negative transfer effects.

## 5. Hypotheses

Based on the discussion in section 4, I advance the following specific hypotheses.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Along with the hypotheses in (12), there is another logically possible alternative. The alternative is that the learner shows sensitivity to various distinctions (e.g., the animacy constraint and the possessor constraint; the possessor constraint on goal and benefactive DOs) simultaneously. This alternative does not predict any ordering at all.

- (12) a. If the learner has acquired the animacy constraint on the goal DO form, the learner begins to show sensitivity to the possessor constraint on the goal DO form (i.e., animacy before possession).
- b. If the learner shows sensitivity to the possessor constraint on benefactive DOs, the learner necessarily shows sensitivity to the possessor constraint on goal DOs (i.e., the possessor constraint on goal DOs is acquired before the corresponding constraint on benefactive DOs: goal before benefactive)
- c. If the learner has acquired the possessor constraint on the goal DO form and the physical transfer constraint on the goal PP form, the learner shows sensitivity to the possessor constraint on benefactive DO form.

In particular, with respect to the hypothesis in (12a), I reason that, in order to truly test learners' knowledge of the possessor constraint, a task that can tease apart animacy and possession is needed. By teasing apart animacy and possession, we can distinguish between two possibilities: (i) learners' sensitivity to the animacy constraint does not reflect knowledge of the possessor constraint – i.e., learners posit an 'animacy' constraint with no deeper linguistic meaning; and (ii) learners' sensitivity to the animacy constraint reflects their developing sensitivity to the possessor constraint. The contexts in which we can tease apart the animacy and possession are presented in Table 1. By keeping an animate goal constant irrespective of possession, we can examine learners' knowledge of the possessor constraint. If the learner's sensitivity is related to his emerging sensitivity to the possessor constraint, he will accept only the context in which the prospective possession reading is possible. This type of learners belongs to learner pattern 1 in Table 1. On the other hand, if the learner is sensitive simply to animacy, without knowledge of the possessor constraint, he will not differentiate two contexts below, accepting both contexts (in which animacy is respected). This type of learners belongs to learner pattern 2 in the table below.

Context	The animacy constraint	The possessor constraint	Learner pattern 1	Learner pattern 2
Context (+ Poss)	√	√	Context (+ poss) accepted	Context (+ poss) accepted
Context (-Poss)	√	X	Context (-poss) accepted	Context (-poss) not accepted

[Table 1] Teasing apart animacy and possession

**Learner pattern 1:** Learners sensitive only to the animacy without knowledge of the possessor constraint

**Learner pattern 2:** learners sensitive to the possessor constraint

√: the learners show sensitivity to the constraint

X; the learners do not show sensitivity to the constraint

As pointed out earlier, I hypothesize that *possession entails animacy*: acquisition of the possessor constraint entails acquisition of the animacy constraint, but not the other way around. Thus, learners should acquire the animacy constraint before the possessor constraint; acquiring animacy should help them develop sensitivity to the possessor constraint. It is natural to think that animacy should be acquired before possession, since the animacy distinction is not context-dependent, while the possession distinction is context-dependent (i.e., discourse-based triggers; cf. Ionin et al. in press).

As an ideal test format in order to tap the learners' knowledge of: (1) the possessor constraint on goal and benefactive DOs; (2) the animacy constraint; (3) the physical transfer constraint, I suggest the grammaticality judgment task with contexts. For each test verb, two contexts were given, only one of which satisfied the constraint being tested. It is predicted that if a subject knew the constraint being tested, s/he would accept the context satisfying the constraint and reject the context violating the constraint. Oh & Zubizarreta (2006) was designed to test the hypotheses in (12). The hypotheses were clearly supported. The findings of the study showed that as predicted, sensitivity to the animacy constraint emerges before sensitivity to the possessor constraint. More importantly, the results showed that sensitivity to the possessor constraint on goal DOs emerges before sensitivity to the corresponding constraint on benefactive DOs. Furthermore, there was an indication that awareness of the subtle semantics associated with the goal DOs and PP forms played an important role in the process of recovering from the negative transfer effects of the L1.

## 6. Concluding remarks

In this paper, I have proposed that the acquisition of the argument structure alternation is comparable to the acquisition of a paradigm. Granting this, I have further advanced the claim for the involvement of the *Avoid Synonymy Principle* in the process of acquiring the argument structure alternation and for the role of indirect negative evidence in this process.

Taking the acquisition of English DO by Korean speakers as a case in point, I have advanced the particular sequence of acquisition of the constraints related to the English dative alternation. In the context of L1 and L2 acquisition, we have argued for the animacy before possession: possession entails the animacy. More importantly, in the context of L2 acquisition (i.e., the acquisition of English DOs by Korean speakers), I have claimed for the acquisition of possessor constraint on goal DOs before the corresponding constraint on benefactive DOs and have provided the theoretical motivation of the suggested sequence.

In relation to the hypotheses and claims put forth in this paper, the following issues deserve further attention. The issue of entailment between awareness of the animacy constraint and that of possessor constraint merits further research. Although I have suggested that the route to the acquisition of the possessor constraint lies through the acquisition of the animacy constraint, there might be other routes that learners make use of. They might acquire (or extract) the possessor constraint directly from contexts (i.e., discourse triggers). If that is indeed (another) valid route, it is quite remarkable given the subtlety of discourse triggers: as pointed out earlier, this distinction is context-dependent and a discourse-based distinction is hard to detect and extract from the input.

Another issue that deserves further investigation in relation to the entailment issue between the animacy constraint and the possessor constraint is to provide an articulated account for how learners go from positing an animacy constraint to positing a possessor constraint that is independent of animacy.

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