

On the L2 acquisition of Spanish Clitic Doubling and the “animacy” effect.

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The lexico-semantic development in L2 acquisition is key to understand how crosslinguistic transfer affects the syntax-semantics interface. To pin down the phenomena that can be vulnerable in this interface, our study examines the L2 acquisition of Spanish clitic doubling (CLD) in double object structures (DOCs) as in (1).

- (1) a. Juan le puso gasolina a su coche
 Juan CLDATIVE put petrol to his car
 “Juan filled his car with petrol”
 b. Ana le dio el libro a su madre
 Ana CLDATIVE gave the book to her mother
 “Ana gave her mother a book”

The relation between datives and DOCs shows irregularities in English and Dutch. One of these irregularities in English deals with the so called “animacy” effect, by which the recipient (indirect object) in the DOC must be animate, (2a) vs (2b), (Krifka, 2004, p.3.)

- (2) a. Andy sent a message to New York
 b. ??Andy sent New York a message

The relationship is quite systematic, however, in Spanish, because this language exhibits applicatives for most DOCs, where CLD plays a crucial role (Demonte 1995, Cuervo 2003, 2007).

In this paper we want to compare results from the acquisition of Spanish L2 based on a Grammaticality Judgment Test (GJ) ran by different groups (elementary, intermediate, advanced) whose L1 is very different: English and Dutch. In the GJ tests used, the learners in all groups were asked to render their grammaticality judgments with respect to CLD in a large number of different syntactic configurations.

The study shows that while there is morpho-syntactic development in the L2 acquisition of Spanish DOCs, replicating previous studies as in Perpiñan and Montrul (2006), both English and Dutch advanced students transfer the “animacy” constraint and, unlike target-like, consistently reject the grammaticality of examples such as in (1a). The claim is that a second low applicative head needs to be learnt to allow for a static possession reading.

References

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