The Acquisition of English Dative Constructions by Korean EFL Children

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Abstract
This paper examines the acquisition of two English dative constructions, prepositional dative (PD) and double object dative (DOD), by Korean EFL children. The goal of this paper is to prove the role of L1-transfer based on language typology. By analyzing corpus data of eight children from KELC (KNU English Learner Corpus, 2008), it was found that Korean EFL learners acquire PD before DOD and they allow scrambled dative structures such as “I give to him a book” or “I give a book him” in English. These results show the transfer of L1 typology because in Korean a morpheme such as a postposition assigns a case and word order is less important. Also, there is an important pedagogical implication that DOD should be more carefully to Korean EFL learners.

Keywords
Dative construction, UG, Language typology, L1-transfer, EFL

Introduction
There are three main factors that affect the L2 acquisition: L2 input, Universal Grammar (UG) and L1-transfer. Needless to say, L2 input is necessary but can vary considerably depending on the learning environment (Lydia White, 1989). The availability of UG is under debate, and most L2 researchers have found that L1-transfer plays a role in L2 acquisition (Ionin, Zubizarreta and Malonado, 2008).

In this paper, I examine the L2 acquisition of English dative constructions by Korean EFL children. As the methodology, eight Korean children corpus data available through KELC(KNU English Learner Corpus, 2008) was analyzed. The results are as follows: Korean EFL children acquire PD earlier than DOD, and they allow free word order in English. It proves the evident L1-transfer effect in the acquisition of English dative constructions.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 1 gives a brief overview of English and Korean dative constructions. Section 2 introduces previous studies on the acquisition of English dative constructions. Section 3 presents research questions, hypotheses and the methodology of the present study. Finally, Section 4 covers discussion and conclusion.

Theoretical background
Dative constructions exist in both English and Korean, but they are a little different in their form. Therefore, we can prove L1-transfer effectively through the investigation of L2 acquisition of English dative constructions.

1.1 English dative construction
1.1.1 Prepositional dative and double object dative
In English, there are two types of dative construction, i.e. prepositional dative (PD) and double object dative (DOD). PD has a preposition such as to or for, so it is composed of [NP + PP]. On the other hand, DOD has no preposition, so it is composed of [NP (Indirect Object) + NP (Direct Object)].

(1) PD: John gives a book to Mary.
    S V NP PP

DOD: John gives Mary a book.
    S V NP NP

1.1.2 English dative verb
Not all English dative verbs can be used in both PD and DOD. Some dative verbs can be used in either PD or DOD, and others can be used in the both constructions.

(2) Only PD: I explained the story to him.
    *I explained him the story.

Only DOD: *It costs $100 to her.
    It costs her $100.

Alternation: I told the truth to people.
    I told people the truth.

1.2 Korean dative construction
1.2.1 Postpositional dative and double object
In Korean, there are two main types of dative construction, i.e. postpositional dative (PD) and double object dative (DOD) as in English. However, Korean allows free word order unlike English. In other words, structures like “John gives a book to Mary,” “John gives to Mary a book,” “John gives Mary a book,” and “John gives a book Mary” are all possible in Korean. It is not evident which word order of Korean dative construction corresponds to that of English.

(3) PD
(a) John-i chayk-ul Mary-eykey cwu-ess-ta.
   John-NOM book-ACC Mary-DAT give-PAST-DEC
   ‘John gave a book to Mary.’
(b) John-i Mary-eykey chayk-ul cwu-ess-ta.
   John-NOM Mary-DAT book-ACC give-PAST-DEC
   ‘John gave a book to Mary.’

DOD
(c) John-i Mary-lul chayk-ul cwu-ess-ta.
   John-NOM Mary-ACC book-ACC give-PAST-DEC
   ‘John gave Mary a book.’
(d) John-i chayk-ul Mary-lul cwu-ess-ta.
   John-NOM book-ACC Mary-ACC give-PAST-DEC
   ‘John gave Mary a book.’

1.2.2 Korean dative verb
Not all Korean dative verbs can be used in both PD and DOD. Most verbs are used in only PD, and especial verbs such as cwu-, kaluchi-, cipwul- can be used in the both constructions. There is no Korean dative verb that is used only in DOD.

(4) Only PD
(a) John-i chayk-ul Mary-eykey ponay-ss-ta.
   John-NOM book-ACC Mary-DAT send-PAST-DEC
   ‘John sent a book to Mary.’
(b) John-i Mary-eykey chayk-ul ponay-ss-ta.
   John-NOM Mary-DAT book-ACC send-PAST-DEC
   ‘John sent to Mary a book.’
(c) *John-i Mary-lul chayk-ul ponay-ss-ta.
   John-NOM Mary-ACC book-ACC send-PAST-DEC
   ‘John sent Mary a book.’
(d) *John-i chayk-ul Mary-lul ponay-ss-ta.
   John-NOM book-ACC Mary-ACC send-PAST-DEC
   ‘John sent Mary a book.’

*Only DOD
Alternation
(a) John-i chayk-ul Mary-eykey cwu-ess-ta.
   John-NOM book-ACC Mary-DAT give-PAST-DEC
   ‘John gave a book to Mary.’
(b) John-i Mary-eykey chayk-ul cwu-ess-ta.
   John-NOM Mary-DAT book-ACC give-PAST-DEC
   ‘John gave to Mary a book.’
(c) *John-i Mary-lul chayk-ul cwu-ess-ta.
   John-NOM Mary-ACC book-ACC give-PAST-DEC
   ‘John sent Mary a book.’
(d) *John-i chayk-ul Mary-lul cwu-ess-ta.
   John-NOM book-ACC Mary-ACC give-PAST-DEC
   ‘John gave Mary a book.’

It is interesting that when a morpheme -cwu is added to an only PD verb, the verb can be used in the DOD.

(5) -cwu + only PD verb → Alternating verb

(a) *John-i Mary-lul chayk-ul ponay-ss-ta.
   John-NOM Mary-ACC book-ACC send-PAST-DEC
   ‘John sent Mary a book.’
(b) John-i Mary-lul chayk-ul ponay cwu-ess-ta.
   John-NOM Mary-ACC book-ACC send BEN-PAST-DEC
   ‘John sent Mary a book.’

1.3 Perspective of UG
According to Chomsky’s markedness theory, there are core grammar (unmarked) and periphery grammar (marked) in UG. Core grammar is common across languages and innate. On the other hand, periphery grammar is exceptional and more complex. Therefore, it is expected that learners acquire unmarked features earlier than marked features.

From the view of UG, PD is unmarked and DOD is marked. There are two reasons PD is considered as unmarked. The first is productivity. According to Mazurkewich (1984) and Miyagawa and Jung (2004), dative verbs are generally used in PD more than DOD. Also, government binding theory by Chomsky says that a preposition can assign a case. Therefore, there is no one-to-one mapping of case assignment in DOD. For these reasons, DOD is regarded as marked and more difficult to be acquired.

(6) PD: John sends a letter to Mary.
DOD: John sends Mary a letter.

1.4 Perspective of language specificity
According to language typology, world’s languages are classified by their structural features. Old English is an inflectional language that has various inflectional forms, but present-day English is close to an isolating language because a (dative) case is assigned by a word order. Therefore, current English has a fixed word order.

On the other hand, Korean is an agglutinative language where most words are formed by joining morphemes and a (dative) case is assigned by adding a morpheme. As a result, in Korean, a morpheme such as a postposition is critical and a word order is less important, so scrambled dative constructions are possible.

(7) English: I give a book to him.
Korean
(a) John-i Mary-eykey chayk-ul cwu-ess-ta.
   John-NOM Mary-DAT book-ACC give-PAST-DEC
   ‘John gave a book to Mary.’
(b) John-i chayk-ul Mary-eykey cwu-ess-ta.
   John-NOM book-ACC Mary-DAT give-PAST-DEC
   ‘John gave a book to Mary.’
(c) John-i chayk-ul Mary-lul cwu-ess-ta.
   John-NOM book-ACC Mary-ACC give-PAST-DEC
   ‘John gave Mary a book.’
2 Previous studies

2.1 L2 studies supporting UG

There are some researches on the L2 acquisition of English dative constructions supporting UG. Mazurkewich (1984) and Hawkins (1987) investigated the acquisition of English dative constructions by French L2 learners. They argued that PD is acquired before DOD and it is because PD is unmarked in UG. However, French has no DOD, so the results might be due to L1-transfer, not UG.

There are some other papers on the L2 acquisition of English dative constructions supporting UG. Moon (2008) and Lee (2009) examined the acquisition of English dative constructions by Korean L2 learners whose L1 has both PD and DOD. They also found that PD is acquired earlier than DOD and suggested the availability of UG in L2 acquisition.

2.2 L1 studies not supporting UG

However, the results of the studies on L1 acquisition of English dative constructions were contrary to L1 studies. Few researchers such as Fischer (1971), Cook (1976) found that English-speaking preschool children had difficulty in comprehending and imitating DOD than PD. From 1980s, most researchers including Gropen at al (1989), Snyder & Stromswold (1997) and Campbell & Tomasello (2001) have found that DOD is preferred to PD by native English-speaking children. The results imply that the markedness theory of UG is not enough to explain the acquisition of dative constructions.

2.3 L2 studies supporting L1-transfer

Recently, there have been some studies explaining the L2 acquisition of English dative constructions using L1-transfer effect. First, Whong-Bar and Schwartz (2002) investigated Korean and Japanese L2 learners and found that only Korean learners have difficulty in the acquisition of DOD. They argued that it is due to the transfer of verbal morpheme: Korean dative verbs need morpheme –cwu to be used in DOD, but there is no verbal morpheme that functions as –cwu in Japanese and English, so Koreans cannot acquire English DOD well. However, in fact, Japanese has verbal morpheme ageru that makes only PD verbs be used in DOD (Oh, 2004). In addition, Whong-Bar and Schwartz disregarded that some Korean dative verbs such as kaluchi-, cipwul- and mek-i- do not need to add verbal morpheme –cwu to be used in DOD.

Second, Oh (2004, 2006) also found that Korean L2 learners do not acquire English DOD well and explained it using structural L1-transfer. According to Oh, the acquisition of L2 structure is facilitated if L2 structure is similar to L1 structure, and the acquisition of L2 structure is delayed if L2 structure is different from L1 structure. She argued that Korean to dative corresponds to English DOD, and Korean for dative does not correspond to English DOD. Therefore, the acquisition of English DOD that does not perfectly correspond to Korean is delayed. However, it is not clear whether Korean PD corresponds to English DOD. Many researchers have argued that Korean PD corresponds to English PD, not DOD. (Kim 2010, Shin 2009, Whong-Barr and Schwartz 2002).

3 The present study

3.1 Research question

The research question of the present study is whether L1-transfer occurs in the acquisition of English dative constructions by Korean EFL children.

3.2 Hypotheses

Based on language typology and L1-transfer, my hypotheses are summarized as follows.

1) Korean EFL learners will acquire PD before DOD. Korean is an agglutinative language where a (dative) case is assigned by adding a morpheme (postposition). Therefore, English PD using a preposition, an evident morpheme, to mark a dative case will be preferred to English DOD where only a word order assigns a dative case.

2) Korean EFL learners will transfer scrambled dative constructions into English. Korean is an agglutinative language where word order is less important, so Korean EFL learners will allow free word order in English.

Table 1: Expected dative constructions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transfer of morpheme</th>
<th>No transfer of morpheme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No transfer of scrambling</td>
<td>PD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transfer of scrambling</td>
<td>Scrambled PD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3 Methodology

3.3.1 Material

As the material of the study, Korean children data available through KELC (KNU English Learner Corpus, 2008) was analyzed. KELC is composed of compositions of 315 Korean EFL children who took
Child English Program at Language Institute of KNU. There were total 8 times of composition, and not all the students participated 8 times of compositions.

The students were classified under six levels – primary, basic, pre-intermediate, intermediate, advanced and post-advanced level - by their proficiency level. English proficiency was judged by two raters who work at Language Institute of KNU.

### 3.3.2 Analytic procedure

There are two analytic conditions to be considered as English dative constructions: a dative construction must convey some kind of transfer of objects or information; a dative construction must have two postverbal arguments.

First, I separated the data by proficiency level. This made examining the developmental aspect of students possible. Next, I separated the data by student. Through this, the individual results such as the first and final use of the dative construction of each student were found.

### 3.3.3 Subjects

Subjects were eight Korean EFL children aged between 10 and 13. Among 17 children who participated 8 times of composition, 8 students were selected by random sampling.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word Types</th>
<th>Word Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number</td>
<td>1,822 14,294</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4 Results

#### 3.4.1 Group results

Only advanced and post-advanced groups produced English DOD construction. Also, the post-advanced level group produced DOD most. Therefore, it is assumed that Korean EFL children acquire English dative constructions in order from PD to DOD.

#### 3.4.2 Individual results

**3.4.2.1 Results of each learners**

Korean EFL children preferred PD to DOD. They produced PD a lot using various prepositions such as to, for, about, and of instead of producing DOD even though DOD is shorter than PD. Also, they even produced DOD of dative verbs such as say and ask that must add morpheme –cwu to be used in Korean DOD. Therefore, verbal morphological transfer hypothesis by Whong-Bar and Schwartz (2002) is not supported.

In addition, Korean EFL children produced 3 scrambled PD and 1 scrambled DOD sentences. It means that Korean EFL learners transfer Korean free word order to English.

### Table 3: Student ID 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Get</td>
<td>For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>Say</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 4: Student ID 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>Scrambled DOD</td>
<td>Give</td>
<td>of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter</td>
<td>Scrambled PD</td>
<td>Say</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter</td>
<td>Scrambled PD</td>
<td>Ask</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Ask</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5: Student ID 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-inter</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-inter</td>
<td>Scrambled PD</td>
<td>Say</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter</td>
<td>Scrambled PD</td>
<td>Ask</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Ask</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 6: Student ID 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-inter</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Tell</td>
<td>About</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-inter</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Tell</td>
<td>About</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Ask</td>
<td>About</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7: Student ID 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inter</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Do</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv</td>
<td>Scrambled PD</td>
<td>Say</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv</td>
<td>Scrambled PD</td>
<td>Ask</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv</td>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>Ask</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 8: Student ID 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inter</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Give</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Say</td>
<td>For</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 9: Student ID 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
### 3.4.2.2 The first uses of dative constructions

Unlike native English-speaking children (Campbell and Tomasello, 2001), Korean EFL children produced PD much more than DOD, at the first uses of dative constructions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adv</td>
<td>PD+DOD</td>
<td>Give</td>
<td>For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv</td>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>Give</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Give</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>DO</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>Give</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4.2.3 The final uses of dative constructions

At the final uses of dative constructions, Korean EFL children produced more DOD than at the first uses. However, they still preferred PD to DOD.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Verb</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Adv</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>say</td>
<td>For</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Adv</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Ask</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>Say</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>Scrambled PD</td>
<td>Give</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>Scrambled DOD</td>
<td>Show</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>DOD</td>
<td>Say</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Ask</td>
<td>About</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Post-adv</td>
<td>PD</td>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>To</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Discussion and conclusion

In summary, the present study shows that Korean EFL children acquire PD before DOD even though DOD is shorter and native English-speaking children acquire DOD before PD. They even produce DOD using dative verbs that must join morpheme –cwu to be used in Korean DOD. In addition, Korean EFL children allow scrambled dative structures in English as in Korean.

Here, I suggest L1 typology transfer effect. Korean is an agglutinative language where a case is assigned by adding a morpheme. Therefore, a word order is less important in Korean. On the other hand, present-day English is close to an isolating language where a word order assigns a case, and DOD is shorter than PD. For these reasons, Korean EFL learners acquire PD earlier than DOD and allow scrambled dative structures in English while native English speakers prefer DOD to PD.

This study, of course, has some limitations. First, the sampled data was not enough for a close investigation. Due to lack of time, I examined only eight Korean EFL learners’ data. The further studies need to be conducted with larger corpus data.

Second, the further studies need to participants whose L1 are different in order to prove evident L1-transfer. Especially, examining Chinese subjects will be very helpful to have a more complete picture of L1-transfer in the L2 acquisition of English dative constructions. Chinese is an isolating language, and has only DOD which is considered as marked. If Chinese EFL learners acquire PD before DOD, it will prove the availability of UG. In reverse, if Chinese EFL learners acquire DOD before PD, it will prove L1-transfer effect.

Despite some limitations, the present study is significant because it is the first research that suggests L1 typology transfer in the acquisition of English dative constructions. Previous studies have focused on UG or morphological transfer or structural transfer of L1. However, they could not explain well why native English speakers acquire DOD earlier than PD and why Korean learners have difficulty in the acquisition of DOD even though the some Korean dative verbs do not need verbal morpheme –cwu to be used in DOD.

Finally, the study also has an important pedagogical implication. Since Korean EFL learners have difficulty in acquiring DOD, EFL teachers need to teach it more carefully to EFL learners.

### References


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