

## L2 Acquisition of Korean locative construction by English L1 speakers

**Sun Hee Park**

Department of Korean Studies  
Ewha Womans University  
Seoul, Korea

sunheepark@ewha.ac.kr

### Abstract

Korean has locative construction as other languages do such as English. Although L2 acquisition of locative construction has been examined in L2 English research, few experimental investigations of Korean L2 acquisition have been conducted. The current study focused on the syntactic alternation among Figure Framed sentence, Ground Framed sentence, Figure only sentence and Ground only sentence. Forced choice task on 72 locative construction have been conducted by 21 Native Korean speakers and 20 advanced L1 English learners of Korean. L2ers showed different acceptability judgment on Korean locative construction which was distinct from their L1 argument structure. The results showed that these asymmetries were driven by L1 effect when the learnability problem arises due to insufficient input.

### Introductions

Locative construction in languages imposes intriguing phenomenon in terms of case marking<sup>1</sup>. Locative verbs compose two different structures with a transitive verb. This phenomenon is known

<sup>1</sup> In researches of error Analysis on L2 Korean case marking, there have been reports on high frequency errors among L2ers of Korean regarding 'ey' and 'ul/lul' substitution. The locative structure has very structural (or systematic) substitution among these two types of case marking in the alternation phenomenon. There have been researches on semantic interpretation on

as 'figure/ground' alternation or locative alternation. Locative verbs denote a transfer of a substance or a set of objects (theme, content, or locatum) into or onto a container or surface (the goal, container, or location) as investigated in Pinker (1989). A substance or a set of objects are often referred as 'figure' and a container or surface is referred as 'ground' in the locative alternation studies. For example, English locative verb '*load*' can have two structures of figure direct object [Figure Frame, henceforth FF] as in (1a) and ground direct object [Ground Frame, henceforth GF] as in (1b).

- (1) a. Irv loaded hay into the wagon.  
[Figure Frame]  
b. Irv loaded the wagon with hay.  
[Ground Frame]

Semantically locative sentences which alternate between FF and GF have different interpretation, often called as 'holistic interpretation'<sup>2</sup>. Syntactically, FF locative constructions whose figure NPs are denoted as objects are argued as unmarked compared to GF. Since FF has unmarked case marking, they have canonical/unmarked

locative structures but since case marking and argument structures are quite important in Korean language as other agglutinative languages. It is worthy investigating what mechanism in L2 language of case marking alternation of Korean happens in the path.

<sup>2</sup> The holistic interpretation will be explained in chapter 2 of this research.





Now let us turn to the other discrepancy. The discrepancy of grammaticality judgments of corresponding locative constructions between English and Korean. As we have seen in (7b), some Korean figure non-alternating verbs semantically correspond to alternating verbs in English. This may lead L2ers whose L1 is English to judge Korean sentence in GF to be grammatical, even though it is not grammatical in Korean.

The structural equivalence of the locative alternation in Korean and English may create a significant confusion/problem for language learners, since despite the affinity in their structural alternation (i.e. existence of alternation phenomenon between figure and ground argument structure), they are quite distinctive in their grammaticality of the semantically corresponding verbs.

We are interested in cross-linguistic variation of locative structures. Therefore, we will specify the verbs that will be examined in the research as in Table 2.

Table 2. Locative verbs classification in this research

Grammaticality	Korean
	Figure non-alternator
Identical with English	Type 1a
	hullita, 'spill'
	pwusta, 'pour'
	kelta, 'hang'
Distinct from English	Type 1b
	ppwulita, 'spray'
	ssahta, 'stock'
	sitta, 'load'

For Type 1a in Table 2, grammaticality judgments over FF and GF in English and Korean are identical. FF is grammatical but GF is ungrammatical in Type 1a. For Type 1b, grammaticality on the FF in English and Korean is ungrammatical. However, grammaticality on GF in Korean and English is distinct from each other. Korean GF is ungrammatical but English GF is grammatical. The linguistic knowledge required for L1-English learners of Korean to learn ground frame by figure

non-alternator verb (7b) is not easily accessible for them since it cannot come from their L1, nor is it easily induced from L2 Korean input alone, and it is not covered as target grammar in the Korean classroom. This (specifically figure non-alternator) causes learnability problem<sup>9</sup> in L2 adult acquisition of Korean locative construction. Therefore, we will focus on the figure non-alternator construction in the study.

## 1 The Study

### 1.1 Research Questions and Hypothesis

**Research Question:** Is there difference in acceptability judgment on Korean non-alternators among Native Korean speakers and L1 English learners of Korean (henceforth, L2ers)?

**Hypothesis:** The L2ers will show different acceptability judgments from Korean native speakers in the figure non-alternator construction, which is distinct from their L1 argument structure.

L2ers of Korean may choose to conform to L2, L1, or canonical linking pattern (or canonical structural realization) in acquisition of locative alternation. If figure non-alternating construction is easy to acquire without focused instruction, there will be no difference in grammaticality judgments of NKs and L2ers. However, Korean figure non-alternating verbs may cause learnability problem to the L1 English learners of Korean. If L2ers conform to L1 argument structure of figure non-alternator, they will show different acceptability judgments in GF from NKs when their L1 argument structure is distinct from L2 Korean. If L2ers follow canonical linking pattern, they will show preferences for FF and Figure only sentence (henceforth F) consistently in acceptability judgments.

### 1.2 Participants

The study participants consisted of two groups: 21 Korean Native speakers (NKs, age range=25~38) and 20 advanced L1 English learners of Korean (L2ers, age range=17-20). NKs were either current university students or graduates of universities in

knowledge and the data that the child is exposed to. In other words, the input is insufficient to alert the learners to the relevant distinction, learnability problem arises.

<sup>9</sup> White (2003:8) argued that learnability problem is constituted by the situation where there is a mismatch between the adult



The descriptive statistics in Table 3 shows that L2ers have chosen the unacceptable sentence more than NKs in GF sentences and G only sentences. The range of L2ers' responses in GF and G of distinct context is marked by boxes in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Median and range of the forced-choice task scores on acceptable locative sentences

L1-L2			median	Range (Min.~Max.)	
Identical	FF	NKs (21)	9	1 (8~9)	
		L2ers (20)	9	1 (8~9)	
	GF	NKs (21)	9	1 (8~9)	
		L2ers (20)	9	1 (8~9)	
	F	NKs (21)	9	1 (8~9)	
		L2ers (20)	9	2 (7~9)	
	G	NKs (21)	9	1 (8~9)	
		L2ers (20)	9	2 (7~9)	
	Distinct	FF	NKs (21)	9	1 (8~9)
			L2ers (20)	9	1 (8~9)
		GF	NKs (21)	9	1 (8~9)
			L2ers (20)	9	3 (6~9)
F		NKs (21)	9	1 (8~9)	
		L2ers (20)	9	2 (7~9)	
G		NKs (21)	9	1 (8~9)	
		L2ers (20)	9	2 (7~9)	

## Discussion

Korean figure non-alternating verbs may cause learnability problem in L1 English learners of Korean. They may choose to conform to L2, canonical linking pattern (or canonical structural realization), or L1.

First, it is assumable that since L2 locative alternation is not focused as target grammar in the classroom, L2ers may not be able to know all the figure oriented verbs are non-alternators in L2. This may have L2ers file to conform to L2 argument structure of locatives. Secondly, L2ers can choose to follow the canonical pattern (or argument structure) or conform to their L2, in which L2ers may simply regard all the FF and F sentences as acceptable and deny all the GF and G sentence as unacceptable.

However, the results showed that advanced L2ers did not conform to L2 argument structure nor did they to canonical linking pattern. They made the acceptability judgments based on their L1 argument structure by showing discrepancy over identical and distinct categories.

L2ers of Korean might have seen that some of Korean ground verbs could alternate, assuming that the alternators in their L1 correspond to L2 locative construction even when all the Korean figure verbs are non-alternators.

## Conclusion

The current study investigated how the interlanguage of L1 English learners of Korean is shown in Korean figure non-alternating verbs' construction. 21 NKs and 20 advanced L2ers of Korean participated in the acceptability judgment tests which were composed of 4 types of locative construction (FF, GF, F, and G).

The results showed that advanced L2ers failed to acquire syntactic distinction in figure non-alternating constructions. They appeared to make their judgments in GF and G constructions in distinct argument structure category based on their L1. This may explain how L2ers depend on L1 knowledge when learnability problem arises.

## Acknowledgments

This work was supported by the National Research Foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean Government (NRF-2014S1A2A1A01028163).

## References

- Andersen, S. A. 1971. On the role of deep structure in semantic interpretation. *Foundation of Language*, 6: 197-219.
- Bley-Vroman, R. and Joo, H. 2001. The Acquisition and interpretation of English locative constructions by native speakers of Korean. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 23: 207-219.
- Choi, M. and Lakshmanan, U. 2002. Holism and locative argument structure in Korean English Bilingual Grammars. *Proceedings of BUCLD 26*: 95-106.
- Ellis, S. L. 2009. The development and validation of a Korean C-Test using Rasch Analysis. *Language Testing*, 26(2): 245-274.

- Grimshaw, J. 1981. Form, Function, and the Language Acquisition Device. In C. L. Baker and J. J. McCarthy, eds., *The logical problem of Language Acquisition*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA.
- Hopper, P. J., and Thomson, S. A. 1980. Transitivity in grammar and discourse. *Language*, 56: 251-299.
- Joo, H-R. 2003. Second language learnability and the acquisition of the argument structure of English locative verbs by Korean speakers, *Second Language Research*, 19(4): 305–328.
- Juffs, A. 1996a. Learnability and the lexicon: theories and second language acquisition research. Philadelphia, John Benjamins, PA.
- Juffs, A. 1996b. Semantics-syntax correspondences in second language acquisition. *Second Language Research*, 12(2): 177-221.
- Kim, C-S 2011. Korean Educational Model for International standards. National Institute of Korean Language. Seoul, Korea.
- Kim, M., Landau, B., and Phillips, C. 1999. Cross-linguistic differences in Children's Syntax for Locative verbs. In *Proceedings of BUCLD 23*, ed. A. Greenhill, H. Littlefield, and C. Tano, 337-348. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.
- Kim, M. 1999. A Cross-linguistic perspective on the acquisition of locative verbs. Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation of the University of Delaware.
- Larson, R. 1988. On the double object construction. *Linguistic Inquiry* 19. 335-392.
- Lee, Hanjung. 1997. The meanings and acquisition of the Korean locative verbs. In Lee, H.J., *Linguistic theories and Korean semantic and syntax acquisition I*. Seoul: Mineum-sa, 103–26.
- Pinker, S. 1989. *Learnability and Cognition*. MIT press.
- Rappaport, M., and Levin, B. 1985. A case study in lexical analysis: The locative alternation. Unpublished manuscript, MIT Center for Cognitive Science.
- White, L. 2003. *Second language acquisition and Universal Grammar*. Cambridge University Press.