

# The Effect of L1 on the Acquisition of English Alternating Unaccusative Structures by Moroccan EFL learners

Khalid Elasri<sup>1</sup> & Rachid Ed-Dali<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mohammed V University in Rabat, k.elas@um5r.ac.ma

<sup>2</sup> Cadi Ayyad University, rachid.eddali.est@gmail.com

**Keywords:** acquisition, influence, morphology

The influence of L1 structure across the languages of a bilingual has been the target of research by linguists who seek to understand how language and cognition affect each other, including the linguistic relativity hypothesis. The present study investigates the effect of L1 on the acquisition of English alternating unaccusative structures by Moroccan EFL learners. These structures consist of verbs that can yield transitive and intransitive sentences (e.g., the child broke the window; the window broke). A contrastive analysis of such structures in both English and MA reveals that, just as in English, there are structures in MA in which the morphemes marking the causative alternation are not realized overtly, and therefore, the theme occupies the subject position (e.g., *ṣ-ṣbaġa neḥfat*; literally: Def-painting dried). Nevertheless, some other English alternating structures (the door closed) can only have passive equivalents in MA (e.g., *l-bab t-sed*; literally: the door was-closed; hence, the ungrammaticality of *\*l-bab sed*; literally: the door closed). Thus, it is hypothesized that Moroccan learners of English may not face acquisitional problems with respect to English unaccusative structures that are similar to their mother tongue, but they may fail to recognize the grammaticality of English alternating unaccusatives that do not have equivalents in their native language. To verify this hypothesis, two instruments are used: a grammatical acceptability judgment task and a translation task submitted to two groups of Moroccan learners of English: Freshmen and master students. The results revealed that the role of L1 (MA) was detected in the acquisition of ergatives due to negative transfer from L1. Based on these results, a number of pedagogical implications are suggested to help learners acquire relevant English ergative constructions.

## References

- Burzio, L. 1986. *Italian syntax: A government-binding approach*. Dordrecht: Reidel.
- Hirakawa, M. 1995. L2 acquisition of English unaccusative constructions. In MacLaughlin D. & McEwen, S. (eds.), *Proceedings of the 19th Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development*. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press. 291–302.
- Hornstein, Norbert & Nunes, Jairo & Grohmann, Kleanthes. (2005). *Understanding minimalism*. 10.1017/CBO9780511840678.
- Pae, H. K., Schanding, B., & Kwon, Y.-J. 2011. Overpassivization of ergatives by adult English language learners. *Paper presented at the American Association for Applied Linguistics*, Chicago, Illinois.
- Park, Kyae-Sung and U. Lakshmanan. 2007. The Unaccusative-Unergative Distinction in Resultatives: Evidence from Korean L2 Learners of English. In A. Belikova, L. Meroni, and M. Umeda (Eds.). *Proceedings of the 2nd Conference on Generative Approaches to Language Acquisition North America* (pp. 328-338). Cascadilla Press.
- Sato, Y. 2009. Jitakoutai wo yurusu hitaikakudoushi no syuutoku ni okeru bogo to UG no eikyo (The effects of UG and L1 on L2 Acquisition of English Alternating Unaccusatives) *LET Kansai Chapter Collected Papers (Japan Association for Language Education and Echnology)*, 12, 37–51.
- Silverman, D. 2010. *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. 3rd Edition, Sage Publications, London.