Testing usage-based learning of English resultative constructions in Korean EFL learners' argumentative essays

The present study investigates the production of English resultative constructions by Korean-speaking learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) from a perspective of usage-based constructional development. English resultative constructions project an object complement as a resultative phrase that denotes a change of path or state of a theme or object[1]. Previous studies on the first language (L1) acquisition of English argument structure constructions revealed a gradual development of facility with resultative constructions in which the productive use of complex constructions like resultatives sets in considerably later than that of syntactically and semantically simpler constructions such as simple transitive and intransitive constructions[2]. The process of developing constructional knowledge from simple to complex constructions in language development is best captured by usage-based language acquisition wherein item-based acquisition advances into a formulation of cognitively more complex and abstract constructional knowledge[3]. Motivated by the usage-based language learning in L1 acquisition, this study examined whether a similar developmental pattern is observed in L2 acquisition by analyzing the usage of a group of English resultative constructions by L2 learners at different proficiency levels in their argumentative essays.

We predicted that the facility of resultative constructions will contribute to differentiating L2 writing proficiency more strongly than that of simple constructions. Specifically, L2 learners with higher proficiency will produce more instances of resultative constructions than lower-proficiency learners. To test these predictions, we analyzed the production of 3 resultative-type constructions (CM, RT, CT) along with 5 non-resultative-type constructions (IU, IM, IR, ST, DI) (Table) in 78 argumentative essays produced by college-level Korean-speaking learners of English[4]. The essays were divided into two proficiency levels (39 beginner and 39 advanced) based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages[5]. Two coders counted the occurrences of the target constructions across the essays (agreement rate: 98%).

Analysis of variance tests (IV=group, DV=frequency of the target constructions) showed that, among these 8 constructions, 4 (ST, CM, RT, CT) contributed significantly to group differences: As proficiency level increased, the essays contained more RT (p<.001), CM (p<.001), CT (p=.010), and ST (p<.001). We subsequently conducted a discriminant function analysis with these 4 variables as predictors to explore the degree of contributive powers to the prediction model among the predictors. The examination of the standardized discriminant function coefficients (DFC) demonstrated that the most powerful predictors to the discriminant function were RT (DFC=.677) and CM (DFC=.651) followed by ST (DFC=.418) and CT (DFC=.387). A classification analysis was also conducted to estimate the agreement degree between the original group membership and the predicted group membership formulated by the discriminant function. The result showed that the discriminant function successfully predicted 82.1% of the advanced and 82.1% of the beginner texts as the original membership, respectively.

Taken together, the current results showed that the 3 resultative-type constructions (CM, RT, CT) significantly contributed to discriminating the L2 writing proficiency,

confirming our predictions that resultative-type constructions can account for L2 writing development. These findings indicate that usage-based constructional development applies to L2 writing development.

(Word count: 496 words)

Table. Argument Structure Construction in English

Type	Construction	Form	Meaning	Example
Non-resultative constructions	Intr-unergative (IU)	S-V	X acts	Tom danced.
	Intr-motion (IM)	S-V-$Obl_{path/loc}$	X moves $Y_{path/loc}$	The fly buzzed into the room.
	Intr-resultative (IR)	S-V-$Comp_{state}$	X becomes Y_{state}	His face turned white.
	Simple transitive (ST)	S-V-O	X acts on Y	Peter pushed Mike.
	Ditransitive (DI)	S-V-O_1-O_2	X causes Y to receive Z	John faxed Jane a letter.
Resultative constructions	Caused-motion (CM)	S-V-O-$Obl_{path/loc}$	X causes Y to move $Z_{path/loc}$	Pat blew it off the table.
	Transitive-Resultative (RT)	S-V-O-$Comp_{state}$	X causes Y to become Z_{state}	Bill kicked the door open.
	Causative (CT)	S-V-O-(to)-V	X causes Y to do Z	She made him drive the car.

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