

Empirical evidence on the acquisition of the English passive construction by L1 speakers of Hungarian

Enikő Tankó
University of Bucharest
tankoeniko@gmail.com

1. Aims

The primary aim of the paper is to investigate parameter setting in L2 English by speakers of Hungarian as L1, also testing the *Full Transfer Full Access Hypothesis* (Schwartz and Sprouse, 1994, 1996; White, 2003, among others) regarding the parameters of the passive/ passive-like constructions. The main questions we shall pursue are whether there is transfer of the passive-like structures from L1 into L2, furthermore if learners of English as L2 can reset the parameters.

A secondary aim of the paper is to analyse the data of the experiment in which we investigated how L1 speakers of Hungarian deal with passive constructions in an L2 which has grammatical markers for the passive (i.e., English), furthermore to see whether L2 learners of English succeed to set the appropriate parameters in L2 and whether appropriate parameter setting occurs in later or earlier stages of language learning.

2. The problem

Hungarian used to have a synthetic verbal passive, formed with the suffix *-tat/-tet* (attested in the codices, Tóth, 2000), now archaic. In contemporary Hungarian, passive meaning is most commonly expressed by the predicative verbal adverbial construction (henceforth PVAC), formed with *van* 'to be' or *lett/lesz* 'become' plus the adverbial participle form of the verb.

- (1) a. Az asztal le **van** festve.
b. Az asztal le **lett** festve.

3. The hypotheses

Our first hypothesis is that subjects will use the PVAC when establishing a correspondent for an English passive sentence, without being aware of the similarities between the two mentioned structures. This would prove the role of the UG when learning an L2. However, when it is not possible to use the PVAC due to aspectual constraints (Kertész, 2005), L1 speakers of Hungarian will use active structures with the direct object in topic position that carry the passive meaning when they are to translate a passive construction. Another hypothesis is that Romanian L2 influences the English L3, thus facilitating the access to the English passive, thus subjects who know more or less Romanian will have better results in the tests involving the English passive voice.

4. The research, conclusions

We have compared three groups of speakers with respect to the manner in which they acquire the English passive: (i) Hungarian speakers from Budapest, with no knowledge of a third language with a passive construction; (ii) Hungarian speakers living in Csíkszereda, Romania, with limited knowledge of Romanian and (iii) bilingual Hungarian-Romanian speakers living in Brassó, Romania.

As our data will show, aspectual properties, furthermore the presence of an overtly expressed agent-phrase of the input verb influence the choice of translation equivalents for the English passive. Furthermore, dialectal variation (Kádár and Németh, 2009, 2010), as well as Romanian influence seem to play an important role in choosing the mentioned equivalents.