

Filling In the Missing Piece in Research on Lexicalization Patterns

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For more than a decade, studies on second language (L2) lexicalization patterns of motion events have examined crosslinguistic differences in encoding semantic elements (e.g., motions, paths, manners) into surface forms (e.g., verbs, prepositions, adverbial clauses). Ultimately, these studies examine the transferability of the L1 form-meaning relationships to interlanguage (IL), claiming that there is an underlying influence of first language (L1) based cognition on L2 acquisition (for a review of previous studies, see Slobin, 2004). This claim of L1 cognitive influence arose from the perspective of linguistic relativity, specifically from Slobin's (1996) *thinking for speaking* hypothesis, which asserts that linguistic demands influence how speakers conceptualize motion events.

Unfortunately, this L1-based cognitive process is not readily observable. Assuming that the hypothesized relationship between language and cognition is at work, most lexicalization pattern studies take form-(non)transfer as a manifestation (or absence) of conceptual transfer, or transfer of the L1 semantic system. Moreover, studies report that some lexicalization patterns can be acquired eventually while others remain L1-like even at advanced levels (e.g., Harley, 1989; Vermeulen & Kellerman, 1999). It seems, then, that the questions we should ask now are: (1) How do L1-based semantics and conceptualizations influence the acquisition of L2 lexicalization patterns? (2) Why is the (non)acquisition process selective? In this light, Han's (2009) Selective Fossilization Hypothesis (SFH) seems to have provided an answer, given that it attempts to tap into the account of semantics and concepts in L2 acquisition to explain the selectivity of the (non)acquisition process.

The SFH is noteworthy in that it highlights the role of semantics and pragmatics in L2 acquisition, and attempts to explain how *semantic and pragmatic conditions* complicate the acquisition of grammatical *forms*, which in turn can lead to fossilization. As Han (2009) puts it, "the more complex the forms are in the way they are determined by discourse-semantic and discourse-pragmatic conditions, the more variable they should appear to be" (p. 153). This account of the semantic and pragmatic factors that drive the selective fossilization process may explain why some L2 lexicalization patterns remain problematic.

English prepositions, for example, are elements of the lexicalization patterns of motion events. Specifically, English prepositions "require the integration of syntactic knowledge and knowledge from other domains" (Han, 2009, p. 154) and are considered "soft features," i.e., grammatical properties whose distributional patterns are constrained by semantic, pragmatic or informational structures (Sorace, 2005). According to Han, such semantic or pragmatic constraints make form-meaning relationships *variable*, which in turn may render the L2 input of these soft features *non-robust*, and the features themselves, fossilizable.

Inagaki's (2002) study provides some empirical evidence that lexicalization patterns involve fossilizable soft features. In his study, Japanese learners failed to interpret the meaning of English prepositional phrases (PPs) correctly precisely because they lacked semantic knowledge of motion verbs. In particular, when prepositional phrases could be interpreted as having both a goal of motion and a location of motion – as in the sentence *John swam under the bridge* – learners failed to interpret the prepositional phrase as having a goal of motion. This,

Inagaki asserts, is a result of the influence of the L1 semantic system: as the Japanese manner verb *swim* [*oyogu*] does not encode direction of motion, it does not allow a prepositional phrase that includes a goal of motion to follow. Consequently, a construction like *John swam under the bridge* can only mean that “John swam in the area which is under the bridge” and not “John went under the bridge by swimming.” Within the framework of the SFH, “under” is prone to fossilization because of its inconsistent (i.e., variable) form-meaning relationship between L1 Japanese and L2 English (i.e., it encodes both goal and location of motion in the L2), which, in turn, depends on the meaning of yet another element, namely motion verbs. From Inagaki's study, it is evident that lexicalization patterns involve fossilizable soft features and that divergent IL meanings, influenced by the L1 semantic system, may be a source of fossilization. Thus, focusing on the L1 and L2 semantic systems in the investigation of form-meaning variability may shed light on the two unanswered questions regarding the acquisition of L2 lexicalization patterns mentioned above.

It is ironic that the validation of L1 semantic or conceptual influence on L2 acquisition was never the main focus of lexicalization pattern studies, despite the claim of “thinking for speaking”. At this point in the lexicalization pattern research, a careful analysis of the variability of form-meaning relationships to ascertain the levels of L1 markedness and L2 input robustness seems to be a promising next step.

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