

A Closer Look at L1 Transfer: a Feature-based Approach

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Abstract

The issue of the relationship between difficulty of L2 acquisition and L1 transfer has been widely investigated by generative SLA researchers. Lardiere, for instance, in her Feature Reassembly Approach (FRA), has recently claimed that “it is clear that some L1-L2 pairings... pose more difficulty than others”. If Lardiere’s claim is correct, then a related (perhaps stronger) claim will follow, namely, that speakers of different varieties of the same L1 would be expected to face different kinds of difficulty, and hence, different reassembly tasks. To verify this claim, this paper proposes a feature-based account for the L1 Arabic-L2 English dative constructions on the basis of which certain predictions are made. The results of a grammaticality judgment task are shown to confirm the predictions by revealing that ‘end state’ Bahraini Arabic learners of English are more accepting of certain L2 English constructions than the corresponding ‘end state’ Tunisian Arabic learners, while the latter learners are more accurate than the former on other L2 English constructions. This, in turn, is claimed to give weight to the ability of the FRA to provide insights into the process of L2 acquisition.

Keywords Arabic, Bahraini/Tunisian; dative; DP-internal concord; L2 English; features; transfer

1. Introduction

Researchers in generative second language acquisition have become interested in the acquisition of formal features (syntactic, semantic, phonological, such as past, masculine, plural...) as a result of developments in the Minimalist Program (Chomsky, 1995) which has taken formal features to constitute the elements within lexical items that are grammatically relevant.

As a result, parametric variation has now become associated with the presence or absence of such features on heads (Chomsky, 1995)².

Various theoretical accounts have been proposed of the second language acquisition of formal features. For instance, the Failed Functional Features Hypothesis (or Representational Deficit Hypothesis) (e.g. Hawkins & Chan, 1997; Hawkins & Hattori, 2006) argues that the learner cannot acquire new (uninterpretable) features not instantiated in the L1, because of critical period effects. Interpretable features, on the other hand, are “given by

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²For a review of the distinction of parameters and features, see, e.g., Chekili, 2016:34.

genetic endowment and are present throughout life” (Hawkins & Hattori, p. 271).

The Full Transfer Full Access Hypothesis (FTFA) (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996), on the other hand, maintains that features not present in the L1 may still be acquired. This approach often goes hand in hand with the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis (e.g. Haznedar & Schwartz, 1997; Prevost & White, 2000) which argues that errors –variability- are not due to any representational (i.e. competence) cause, but rather to learners’ inability to ‘map’ between a lexical –morphological- component and the syntactic component. In this approach, new features may still be acquired.

A more recent approach is Lardiere’s (2008, 2009) Feature Reassembly Approach (FRA) which, also, involves feature-based cross-linguistic comparisons. Lardiere claims that morphological variability is due to “a problem of morphological competence”: errors come from L2 learners’ inability to ‘reassemble’ features from the way they are organized in the L1 to the way they must be assembled in the L2. Unlike previous approaches which explain variability in terms of a transfer of L1 parameters, the FRA proposes instead that the features assembled into L1 lexical items are transferred to the L2 lexical items. Lardiere argues that the L2 learner first looks for correspondences between the L2 lexical items and similar items in their L1. Mapping of the L2 item to the L1 features of the corresponding item then takes place. Next, evidence in the input will determine whether feature reassembly (addition, deletion...) is necessary. A precondition for the occurrence of feature-reassembly is the existence of the relevant evidence in the input and the ending of L1 interference, stemming from the way features are assembled on L1 and L2 lexical items. In case this precondition is not met, learnability problems will occur resulting in delay in acquisition. The implication of this approach, as summarized in Chekili, p. 35, is that “[a]lthough the set of features is hypothesized to be universal, features are not activated or organized in the same way in all languages”. The FRA is based on Minimalism (Chomsky, 1995; 2000; 2001; 2004) which takes variation between languages to result from the way syntactic features are assembled on lexical items: For Chomsky (Chekili, 2016), “there are two processes involved in language acquisition: feature selection and feature assembly. Feature selection selects the appropriate features... necessary for the construction of the lexical items in the language ([FL1]); feature assembly combines the features of [FL1] into particular lexical items (LexL1). ...The significance of this is that parametric differences between languages will result from the particular features selected and from the way they are assembled”. Thus, Chomsky's thinking has seen a pattern of development from the concept of “macro-parameters, applied at the level of whole languages, to micro-parameters, applied differentially across dialects, word classes or even individual lexical items, resulting in an approach to language variation that is essentially lexicalist in nature” (Stringer, 2012, p. 254), an approach which Lardiere (2009) labelled the FRA.

The above discussion clearly showed that the L1 plays an important role in L2 acquisition. Lardiere (2013, p. 9), in connection with the question: “To what extent (if any) is ultimate attainment of the L2 determined or delimited

by the categories and features of the L1?”,³ concludes: “[i]t is clear that some L1-L2 pairings (among other factors) pose more difficulty than others...”.⁴ This difficulty in acquisition has been widely investigated and confirmed within a FRA – where consistency in use of the source language is assumed-in, e.g.; Choi & Lardiere, 2006; Hopp, 2010; Ionin & Montrul, 2010; Lardiere, 2007 ..., but not, to the best of my knowledge, in cases where such consistency is absent, i.e. where speakers of different varieties of a given L1 are attempting to learn an L2. I will argue that if Lardiere's claim is correct, then a related (perhaps stronger) claim will follow, namely, that speakers of different varieties of the same L1 would be expected to face different kinds of difficulty and hence different reassembly tasks in the target language. In fact, as argued by Jarvis & Pavlenko (2008, p. 41ff), discussing types of evidence for cross-linguistic influence (CLI), and following Broselow (1992), “...the degree of consistency [speakers] exhibit in their use of the recipient language should ideally be considered in relation to the degree of consistency they show in their use of the source language. A given source language will, after all, have multiple registers, dialects and idiolects, and such differences can lead speakers of the same source language to perform differently in the recipient language”. In other words, differences in the recipient language are also predicted to occur as a result of different varieties of the same source language.

In the present article, Lardiere's conclusion will be considered in light of two varieties of L1 Arabic learners of L2 English. Using two varieties of the same language (rather than two different L1s) would lend more weight to this conclusion as the two varieties are closely related and thus, the results would be more fine-grained. Similarly, if Lardiere's conclusion turns out to be correct for different varieties of the same L1, then it will also have to be correct for different L1s, lending further support to her claim. This will be supported by results of a grammaticality judgment task (GJ task) which reveal that advanced Bahraini Arabic (BhA) learners of the English dative constructions⁵ are more accepting of double object (DO) constructions (with certain verbs) and of prepositional (PP) constructions (with pronominals) than the corresponding Tunisian Arabic (TA) learners, whereas TA learners are more accurate on constructions where a pronoun is adjacent to the verb. Although a large number of L2 acquisition studies (within different frameworks) involving English and Arabic have been conducted, where Arabic instantiates a particular variety (e.g. Al-Jadani, 2016; El-Nabih, 2010; Hamdan, 1997; Leal et al., 2016, and many others), to the best of my knowledge, not many have involved a comparison of different varieties of L1 in regard to learning an L2, and most of these have involved pronunciation systems (cf. e.g.; Almbark et al., 2014; Broselow, 1992; Gardner, 2010; O'brien & Smith, 2010).

³For Lardiere's explanation of the importance of “the question of (persistent) L1 influence at the L2 end state, see Lardiere, 2013, p.3.

⁴For a summary of the generative SLA approaches to L1 transfer, see Lardiere 2013, p.5ff.

⁵For a review of transfer in SLA and the English dative alternation see, e.g. DeCuyper et al., 2014.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 demonstrates how the FRA can be implemented, discussing its implications and predictions in light of L1 TA learners of L2 English DP-internal concord, and suggesting the mapping and reassembly tasks necessary for acquisition. The purpose of the inclusion of this subsection is to illustrate how syntactic derivational operations (relevant for the discussion in section 3) can be triggered by syntactic and semantic features (as argued by Aoun & Li, 2003 (cited in Lardiere, 2008, p.128)). Another purpose is to show how, once the relevant features have been identified in L1 and L2, the reassembly task takes place, and what this involves in terms of ease/difficulty. Section 3, using different varieties of Arabic, will then propose a feature-based account for the L1 Arabic varieties-L2 English dative constructions. In the remaining sections, speakers of the two varieties are tested in connection with the acquisition of the English dative constructions, in order to determine whether they face different/similar learnability problems, and more generally, whether L2 acquisition is also sensitive to dialectal difference.

2. L2 Acquisition of English DP-Internal Concord

2.1. Description

Attributive adjectives are postnominal in Arabic (TA is, here, used as representative of Arabic varieties), but prenominal in English (1); they show concord in phi-features in Arabic but absence of agreement concord in English (2); they show definiteness agreement in Arabic but not in English (3); finally, Arabic DPs with multiple modifiers, display different word orders in Arabic and English (4):

- (1) a. wliid kbiiir TA
boy big
b. A big boy
- (2) a. wliid kbiiir /bnayya kbiiir-a / wlaad/bnaat kbaar
boy big.Msc girl big-Fem boys/girls big.Pl
b. big boy/girl/boys/girls
- (3) a. l-bnayya l-kbiira
the-girl the-big
b. The big (*the) boy
- (4) a. This small Indian car (example from Shlonsky, 2015)
b. l-karhba l-hindiya l-Sghiiira haadhi
the-car the-Indian the-small this

2.2. Analysis

Since Abney (1987), Bernstein (2001), Valois (1991) and others, noun phrases have been analyzed as functional projections with a number of functional heads (and their projections) dominating the lexical NP projection. These include DP, but, also, NumberP (Ritter, 1991), GenderP (Picallo, 1991)... . Ritter made a distinction between number and gender, taking the latter, but not the former, to be an inherent feature of nouns and, hence, part of the noun's lexical entry. This analysis, whereby a functional projection (NumP or AgrP or FP...) is located between NP and DP, makes it

agreement- onto the corresponding lexical items in English, with the correct consequences in terms of absence of displacement and of agreement features.

2.3. Features and Learning Tasks

Based on correspondences in meaning and/or grammatical function (cf. Gil & Marsden, 2013 for an elaboration), learners would map:

- L2 prenominal adjectives to L1 postnominal adjectives
- L2 absence of agreement concord to L1 agreement concord
- L2 absence of definiteness agreement to L1 definiteness agreement
- L2 word order (no movement) to L1 word order (movement)

What this means is that there is no direct mapping, and we, therefore, predict difficulty mapping the L2 forms, and possible transfer, requiring reassembly (but see below). Possible error types include:

- (8) a. *The boy big
 b. *big boys
 c. *The big the boy
 d. * the car the Indian the small this

2.4. Feature Reassembly

Here, ease/difficulty depends on poverty of the stimulus (cf. e.g. Gil & Marsden, 2013). Assuming the L1-based features to be as in (9), and the corresponding English features as in (10), the reassembly task would consist in the following:

-Learners must delete the features on modifiers (9c) in order to learn about prenominal order and order of the modifiers. Positive evidence comes from examples like *big car*, *kind person*. Therefore, ease of learning is predicted.

-Learners must delete uAgr Features on adjectives (9a). Again, positive evidence is available from examples such as *big boy/ big girl/ big houses*. No difficulty is expected.

-Learners must delete the uDef Feature on adjectives (9b). In this case, positive evidence could come from examples including a sequence of adjectives, e.g. *the kind old man*.

- (9) a. uAgr features on A
 b. uDef on A
 c. uFeatures on modifiers

(Note that the three cases may be collapsed into one)

- (10) a. Absence of uAgr features on A
 b. Absence of uDef on A
 c. Absence of uFeatures on modifiers

To conclude, although feature reassembly does not seem to pose much difficulty as a result of the availability of positive evidence, what the previous discussion has suggested is confirmation of how syntactic operations are triggered by morphosyntactic and semantic features.

3. L2 Acquisition of the English Dative Constructions

In this section, a feature-based account of the dative constructions will be proposed for the purpose of determining whether the feature reassembly tasks facing speakers of two varieties of Arabic are similar or different. The

motivation for using two varieties of the same language (rather than two different L1s) is that, in case the reassembly tasks should turn out to be different, this would lend more weight to Lardiere's conclusion (section 1), as the two varieties are closely related and thus, the results would be more fine-grained. Similarly, if Lardiere's conclusion turns out to be correct for different varieties of the same L1, then it will also be correct for different L1s lending further support to her claim. Finally, the aim of this section is not so much to account for the dative alternation (hence the use of the term *constructions* rather than *alternation*) as to investigate- in line with generative linguistic research- whether/how the constructions may be generated by the grammar (see below), and to argue for the relevance of different L1 varieties for the FRA.

3.1. A Brief Overview of the Dative Alternation

The dative alternation, illustrated in (1) below, has been approached for many years, within different frameworks (e.g. cognitive, generative) and from several different perspectives (semantic, syntactic, lexical). No review will be thorough enough to do it justice (For a review of previous work, see, e.g., Gerwin, 2014).

- (1) a. John gave the book to Mary = Prepositional Phrase dative (PP)
b. John gave Mary the book = Double Object dative (DO)

This alternation has been investigated with respect to a number of constraints, such as, the verb's semantics which groups verbs into alternating/ non-alternating categories and classes (e.g. Gropen et al, 1989; Levin, 1993) and object-related aspects, such as syntactic weight, definiteness and animacy, and pronominalization (e.g. Arnold et al, 2000; Hawkins, 1994). In this section, I will have nothing to say about object-related constraints but will concentrate on the verb. A number of issues have divided scholars interested in the dative alternation: e.g. whether it is a lexical or syntactic phenomenon (Green, 1974; Oehrle, 1976; Emonds, 1993; Emonds & Whitney, 2006); whether it is best approached within the generativists' 'single-meaning' analysis or the 'uniform multiple meaning approach' (Goldberg, 1992) or the 'verb sensitive approach' according to which some dative verbs have only a caused possession meaning (e.g. Give-type verbs) while other verbs (e.g. Throw- and Send-types) have both caused possession and caused motion meanings (Rappaport Hovav & Levin, 2008). Another issue which has, also, divided scholars was the question of which verbs show the alternation: for instance, Levin classifies the *Carry* verbs as an alternating class, but Gropen et al (1989) include them in their list of non-alternating verbs, as shown in (2):

- (2) I pulled the box to John / *I pulled John the box

Another verb-related issue is the so-called 'Latin restriction' according to which only verbs with a native stem may occur in DO constructions (cf. e.g. Mazurkewich & White, 1984; Oehrle, 1976). This constraint is not without problems: first, it has many exceptions, including verbs like *promise* and *pay* which allow both constructions. Second, constraints based on etymology pose a learnability problem in that learners (children and adults) would have no clue as to the origin of the verb. More recent approaches have preferred to

use phonological concepts such as stress and prosody in order to define this particular class of verbs (see for example, Coppock, 2009; Gropen et al, 1989).

Such problems (and others) have led some linguists to propose approaches to alternating verbs based on large quantities of data rather than on individual intuitions. Corpus data, e.g. Bresnan & Nikitina (2003, 2009) has shown that classifying verbs into alternating, DO-only or PP-only verbs is not tenable, and that it is safer to talk of the probability of a verb happening in one construction or another.

Finally, the dative alternation has been investigated, not only in English, but also in many different languages as L1s, see e.g. Bresnan et al, 2007; Bresnan & Nikitina, 2009; Camilleri et al., 2014; Coppock, 2009; Emonds, 1972; 1993; Emonds & Whitney, 2006; Fillmore, 1965; Gerwin, 2014 (and references there); Gropen et al, 1989; Hawkins, 1994; Jackendoff, 1975; Levin, 1993; Mazurkewich & White, 1984; Oehrle, 1976; Pinker, 1982; Rappaport Hovav & Levin, 2008.

The L2 acquisition of the dative alternation has also been widely investigated in different languages and within different frameworks, e.g. L1 German-L2 English: Jashke & Plag, 2016; L1 Russian-L2 English: De Cuypere et al., 2014; L1 Arabic-L2 English/ L1 English-L2 Arabic: Al-Jadani, 2016; L1 Spanish-L2 English: Agirre, 2015; L1 Brazilian-L2 English: Zara et al., 2013; L1 Chinese-L2 English: Chang, 2004; different L1s-L2 English: Hawkins, 1987; Le Compagnon, 1984; Mazurkewich, 1984; Tanaka, 1987; Inagaki, 1997; Jaschke, 2016, and references there; L1 English-L2 Arabic: Hamdan, 1997.

3.2. Aims and Description

Lardiere's (2009) minimalist-based FRA, with its emphasis on lexical features, can provide interesting insights into the analysis of the (L2) acquisition of the dative constructions, which has been shown to be essentially, a lexical phenomenon. As was pointed out by Stringer (2012, p. 253) in connection with the acquisition of motion events, "...generative linguistic investigations have been less concerned with the larger issues of event construal and rhetorical style (as in cognitive, semantic and typological work) and more focused on the narrow issue of what may be legitimately generated by the grammar. Where languages differ formally in this regard [...] is in how particular predicates differ in terms of the lexical semantic features they bear".

In line with generative linguistic research, and following Stringer, the intention, here, is not to account for which verbs are alternating verbs, which are DO-only and PP-only verbs, nor for any preferences among the two constructions, rather, the intention is to find out whether/how the constructions may be generated by the grammar; in other words, how the features of one particular predictor – the verb- are reassembled for English by TA and BhA learners respectively, and hence, as stated earlier, to argue for the relevance, for the FRA, of different L1 varieties. To begin with, let us consider the argument realizations of the dative verbs in the two varieties. For Levin (2007), "The same associations of dative verbs with event schemas would be expected across languages. However, the associations of the event

schemas with particular argument realizations are likely to differ [...] across languages” (p.8). Assuming the event schemas (possession, motion) to be uniform across languages, we have the following morphosyntactic realizations in TA and BhA:

1. Similarly to English, certain verbs (e.g. *Give*), have two different argument realizations, namely DO and PP:

- (3) a. MuHammad `Taa l-ktaab li-l-wlid TA
Mohamed gave the-book to-the-boy
b. MuHammad `Taa l-wlid l-ktaab

However, the alternation is limited. It only affects a sub-class of the Give-type, and is absent in other classes of verbs:

- (4) a. kraa l-biit li-l-bnayya TA
he.rented the-room to-the-girl
b. *kra l-bnayya l-biit

2. Owing to the scrambling possibilities of the Arabic varieties, the recipient may either follow or precede the theme for information structure purposes (cf. Rappaport Hovav et al., 2008 p. 161, in connection with rigid vs. free word order languages). Consequently, with the exception of the verbs mentioned in (1), for most verbs (contrary to English), there is no need for two argument realizations:

- (5) a. b`ath jwaab li-l-raajil TA
he.sent letter to-the-man
b. b`ath li-l-raajil jwaab

3. BhA, contrary to TA, demonstrates certain cases of optionality in the realization of argument structures:

- (6) a. ?ajjar `ala l-bint l-ghurfa
he.rented to the-girl the-room
b. ?ajjar l-bint l-ghurfa

- (7) a. baa` `ali-ha l-sayyaara
he.sold to-her the-car
b. baa` ha l-sayyaara

4. In TA, *-li* (*to*) is phonologically weak as it often appears in a reduced form (*-l*); in BhA, on the other hand, the equivalents of *-li*, namely, *la*, *`ala*, and *Hag*, behave like strong forms. TA *-li*, with its phonetic variants *-li*, *-il* and *-l*, hosts the clitic object pronouns with the combination cliticizing onto the verb host. (8) shows that *-li* cannot be detached from the verbal element:

- (8) b`ath-l-u jwaab vs. *b`ath jwaab l-u

In case the object is nonpronominal, then *-li* attaches to the object and hence the two orders are possible:

- (9) b`ath-li-l-raajil jwaab vs. b`ath jwaab li-l-raajil

This is also evident from Yes-No questions:

- (10) b`ath-l-uu-shi but: b`ath-shi li-l-raajil
he.sent-to-him-Q he.sent-Q to-the-man

Another argument for the clitic analysis comes from the fact that *-li* seems to form a phonological word with its host; for instance, it obeys phonological rules such as vowel deletion (11a) and metathesis (11b):

- (11) a. b`ath-li-ik → b`ath-l-ik
he.sent-to-you

- b. b`ath-li-ha → b`ath-il-ha
 he.sent-to-her

Coordination also demonstrates the clitic nature of *-li*, as shown by (12):

- (12) *b`ath-l-u wa li-ha
 he.sent-to-him and to-her

On the other hand, the corresponding forms in BhA, seem to be strong forms to which object clitics may attach, hence the free word order displayed in (13):

- (13) a. Tarrash la-ha risaala
 he.sent to-her letter
 b. Tarrash risaala la-ha

Here, as expected, coordination is possible:

- (14) Tarrash la-ha wa la-hu l-risaala

3.3. Mapping tasks

I will here concentrate on three classes of verb, namely, Give, Throw and Send. This choice is motivated by the fact that these classes have been argued to instantiate different meanings, i.e. caused possession meaning for the first; caused possession and caused motion for the second and third (see, e.g. Rappaport Hovav et al., 2008). Another reason is that the test contrasts with these verbs are clear from the perspective of the native speaker (see below). With this in mind, the mapping tasks are as follows:

-L2 English Give-type verbs (alternating) are initially mapped onto L1 TA/BhA Give-type verbs. With some verbs (e.g. `Taa, sallaf, ?a`aar) mapping is straightforward. However, as not all Give-type verbs are alternating verbs in Arabic, difficulty is expected with certain verbs: no direct mapping. For BhA, the mapping task involves less difficulty for some of these verbs owing to the optionality discussed earlier (examples (7-8)).

-L2 English Throw-/Send-type verbs (alternating) are initially mapped onto L1 TA/BhA Throw-/send-type verbs (non-alternating): no direct mapping; hence difficulty is expected but may be overcome by the end state (see below).

3.4. Reassembly tasks

Integrating semantic and formal approaches, the following feature- based account for the L1 Arabic-L2 English dative constructions is proposed: Taking the relevant features to be [Possession] and [Motion] (following Levin, 2007) and in line with Stringer's (2012) adaptation of the representation of the locative alternation (adapted from Emonds, 1991, 2000) which proposes that the features may be carried either by the verb or the preposition⁶, the reassembly tasks facing the L1 Arabic-L2 English learner, would involve the following⁷:

⁶The parentheses in the representations indicate the possibility of alternation. Alternatively, the alternation may be represented by the feature [-+OPTION]. V(Poss)...P(Poss) = V[Poss][Opt]...P[Poss][Opt]

⁷In line with Minimalism, we may suppose that the verb bears [ufeatures] in small v. These features could be checked and deleted by similar interpretable features in V (by means of raising and adjoining to v). However, if V does not include an interpretable feature, then the [ufeatures] in v would not be checked and the derivation would crash. E.g.

L1 TA	L1 Bha	L2 English
1. Give-type verbs:		
a) (e.g. `Taa, sallaf...) V(Poss)...P(Poss)	a) (`aTaa, ?a`aar...) V(Poss)...P(Poss)	a) All Give-type verbs V(Poss)...P(Poss) ⁸
b) (e.g. baa`, kra...) V...P[Poss]	b) (baa`, ?ajjar...) V(Poss)...P(Poss)	b) same as (a) V(Poss)...P(Poss)
2. Throw-/Send-type verbs:		
a) V...P[Poss]	a) V...P[Poss]	a) V(Poss)...P(Poss)
b) V...P[Poss, Mot]	b) V...P[Poss, Mot]	b) V...P[Poss, Mot] ^{9/10}

3.5. Predictions

First (1a,b), for both TA and Bha, Give-type verbs do not behave in a uniform fashion (unlike English); for some (1a) (e.g. `Taa, `aTaa, sallaf, ?a`aar) no reassembly is required, and hence, no difficulty is anticipated. Evidence comes from the availability of English DO and PP constructions. Relevant examples:

(15) a. l-raajil `Taa / sallaf ktaab l-nabiil
 The-man gave/lent book to-Nebil
 TA

b. l-raajil `Taa / sallaf nabiil ktaab

(16) a. al-rajul `aTaa/?a`aar kitaab Hag nabiil
 Bha

b. al-rajul `aTaa/?a`aar nabiil kitaab

(17) The man gave/ lent a book to Nebil / The man gave/ lent Nebil a book

For others (1b) (e.g. sell, rent) TA and Bha behave differently: TA learners must add features to V and the possibility of alternation (indicated by the parentheses): more specifically, they must add [Poss] and [+Opt]. This is ultimately motivated by evidence, but with some delay. Initially, learners are predicted to produce scrambled structures:

(18) a. kra l-biit li-l-bnayya
 (He) rented the-room to-the-girl

b. *kra l-bnayya l-biit
 (He) rented the-girl the-room

c. kra li-l-bnayya l-biit
 (He) rented to-the-girl the-room

(19) He rented the room to the girl/ He rented the girl the room/ *He rented to the girl the room

baa': V...P [Poss]= no feature in V, hence v must not include a [uf] in order not to generate: *Huwa baa' muHammad l-karhba

⁸This reads: an object is interpreted as involving caused possession if the predicate, either V or P, has the relevant feature.

⁹This reads: an object is interpreted as involving caused possession if V has the relevant feature (a); an object is interpreted as involving caused possession or caused motion if P carries the relevant features (b).

¹⁰The difference between (2a) and (2b) will not be tested as the difference may not be obvious to the participants.

In BhA, on the other hand, some of these verbs may or may not allow DO, e.g. ?ajjar, baa`. In the second case, the situation is similar to TA; in the first, no reassembly is required to learn sentences such as *they rented the girl a room*. Thus for verbs like ?ajjar, baa` BhA learners will accept English DO more readily than TA learners, as, in this case, there is no need for reassembly. However, learners are faced with a poverty of the stimulus problem with cases involving scrambling, e.g. **They rented to John the car*. As the input does not provide evidence of the ungrammaticality of such sentences, learners may allow them even at advanced levels of proficiency:

(20) a. ?ajjar l-ghurfa `al l-bint

(He) rented the-room to-the-girl

b. ?ajjar l-bint l-ghurfa

rented the-girl the-room

c. ?ajjar `al l-bint l-ghurfa

rented to the-girl the-room

(21) He rented the room to the girl/ He rented the girl the room/ *He rented to the girl the room

Secondly (2a,b), for (2a) (*Throw/Send*), TA and BhA learners must add [Poss] to V as well as the possibility of alternation found in English ([+Option]) This is motivated by evidence, but with some delay. Learners would, initially produce scrambled forms:

(22) a. l-raajil b`ath jwaab l-nabiil

TA

the-man sent letter to-Nebil

b. *l-raajil b`ath nabiil jwaab

(23) a. Tarrash l-risaala Hag l-bint

BhA

(He) sent the-letter to the-girl

b. *Tarrash l-bint l-risaala

(24) He sent a letter to Nebil/ He sent Nebil a letter/ *He sent to Nebil a letter
For (2b), no change in the feature makeup and therefore, no reassembly is required.

Finally, when the recipient is pronominal (with *Throw/Send* classes), while no reassembly is required for BhA learners (see subsection 2 above, examples (13)) TA learners must, somehow, delink the clitic and the verb in TA and treat the English pronominal like the TA nominal, i.e. an element capable of occurring after the preposition *-li*, sentence-finally (cf. *b`ath jwaab l-nabiil* (*he sent a letter to-Nebil*) = *He sent a letter to him*). This is ultimately motivated by evidence, but with some delay. In other words, BhA learners would easily accept English PP constructions with pronominals in final position, such as *He sent a letter to her* (cf. examples (8) and (13)). TA learners, on the other hand, would be more inclined (initially) towards constructions parallel to *b`ath-l-u jwab*, namely, **He sent to him a letter*, before switching to *He sent him a letter*. **He sent to him a letter*, illustrating the V-to pronoun constructions, is also predicted to occur in both groups of learners even at an advanced level (see below, Discussion section).

3.6. Summary of the predictions

The following predictions are made on the basis of the preceding discussion:

1 For some Give-type verbs (e.g. give, lend) no reassembly is required and hence no difficulty is anticipated for both TA and BhA.

2 For other Give-type verbs (e.g. sell, rent), it is predicted that BhA learners would face less difficulty accepting English DO than TA learners.

3 When the recipient is pronominal, three situations may arise:

3a. BhA learners are predicted to be more accepting, than TA learners, of PP with pronoun in final position.

3b. Both groups of learners are predicted to accept V-to-pronoun constructions even at an advanced level.

3c. TA learners are predicted to be more accepting of V-pronoun constructions.

4 Both groups of learners are predicted to use scrambled structures even at an advanced level.

5 For Throw-/Send-type verbs, difficulty is expected initially, but easily overcome ultimately.

In order to test for these predictions, TA and BhA learners of English completed a grammaticality judgment (GJ) task.

4. Methodology

Assuming that GJ tests are reliable measures of L2 syntactic competence (see, for example, Mandell, 1999), a significant correlation is predicted to appear between the populations to be tested and their competence.

4.1. Subjects

A total of 40 students (20 native speakers of BhA -students from the University of Bahrain, and 20 native speakers of TA -students from the University of Manouba, Tunis) were selected to take part in the study. The selection was made on the basis of two criteria demonstrating, both, ultimate attainment or 'end state' –specifically, advanced proficiency, motivation...- (cf. Lardiere, 2007; Long, 2003 cited in Lardiere, 2013, p. 3) and comparable proficiency determined on the basis of classroom level and an independent proficiency measure. All of the participants had studied English for a comparable number of years in secondary school before starting university and all had subsequently completed a BA degree in English and were now in their first or second year of Master of English. It may be safely assumed, therefore, that they were now in a state referred to as L2 ultimate attainment or 'end state' (Lardiere, p. 3). Moreover, on top of the fact that the two groups have had a comparable number of years of ESL learning at the time of the test, instruction at the two universities was similar. In both institutions, for instance, the BA programme includes a comparable number of closely related language and content courses (for more information on the curriculum and assessment procedures, see the departments' respective websites). In order to further check for homogeneity in proficiency standards among the two groups, an independent (the Oxford Quick Placement-OPT) test was used as an additional measure. The students were selected on the basis of their comparable scores on the test: they all scored between 48 and 60 and hence were classified within the same group of “advanced learners” (table 1):

Table 1
The participants' demographic information

	Number	Age range	OPT score
Group 1 BhA	20	22-26	48-60
Group 2 TA	20	22-28	48-60

4.2. Procedure

The GJ task selected was the binary response scale. This is so as the test contrasts are unambiguous from the perspective of the native speaker (see Ionin & Zyzik, 2014). This unambiguous nature of the test contrasts, also, made the inclusion of a native speaker control group unnecessary. The aim of the GJ task was to tap the learners' knowledge of the grammaticality of the structures presented to them. The participants were asked to use their intuitive knowledge to answer a written GJ test (see the Appendix) consisting of 28 sentences. The test was not timed, but the students were requested to respond to each sentence as soon as they had read it. The responses were scored on a binary scale: a judgment considered accurate was scored 1 and a judgment considered inaccurate was scored 0.

4.3. Materials

The sentences- both grammatically correct and incorrect- to be judged were selected in accordance with the predictions made earlier (3.6.). The sentences include exemplars of the dative constructions with certain verb types. Each group of test sentences tested one particular category based on each of the predictions made earlier: Category 1= no reassembly required; Category 2= DO with two full NP's; Categories 3a, 3b, 3c = Constructions with pronouns; Category 4= scrambling; Category 5= DO with 'Throw/Send'. The categories were exemplified by 18 sentences of the patterns DO and PP, both grammatically correct and incorrect. The number of sentences illustrating each category is identical (two sentences each): Given that Categories 1 and 5 are illustrated by two constructions each, namely, DO and PP, whereas the rest of the categories are illustrated by one construction only, either DO or PP, we have the following situation: Category 1: DO (n=2), PP (n=2); Category 2 (n=2); Category 3a (n=2); Category 3b (n=2); Category 3c (n=2); Category 4 (n=2); Category 5: DO (n=2), PP (n=2).

Examples of each type of item are shown in (25-29):

(25) The teacher gave the book to the student / He lent his daughter the car: Category 1

(26) The landlord rented the student the room: Category 2

(27) John threw the ball to her / John threw her the ball / *John threw to her the ball: Category 3

(28) He shot to the player the ball: Category 4

(29) Peter sent a letter to his father / Peter sent his father a letter: Category 5

The sentences were distributed randomly rather than in matched pairs as the aim was not for the respondent to express his/her preference of one sentence over the other. Finally, 10 distractors were interspersed between

the test sentences in order not to draw the student's attention to the purpose of the study.

5. Findings

The 1/0 coded data was submitted to the SPSS software for analysis. The mean scores for each of the five categories and relevant sentences are summarized in tables 2 and 3 below: table 2 describes the list of accurate responses for all the BhA participants on the GJ test sentences; table 3 does the same for the TA participants.

Table 2

List of accurate responses for all the BhA participants

Category	Frame	Sentence No.	Total	Mean %	Total Mean %
1	Give PP	1	13	65	75
	Give DO	11	16	80	
	Lend PP	20	17	85	
	Lend DO	23	9	45	
2	Rent DO	3	12	60	70
	Sell DO	12	16	80	
3 (a)	Prn. Final	8	17	85	90
	Prn. Final	26	19	95	
(b)	V-to-prn.	*17	18	90	85
	V-to-prn.	*15	15	75	
(c)	V-prn.	2	8	40	40
	V-prn.	24	8	40	
4	PP NP	*7	17	85	85
	PP NP	*22	18	90	
5	Throw PP	4	14	70	55
	Throw DO	16	8	40	
	Send PP	21	14	70	
	Send DO	25	12	60	

Table 3

List of accurate responses for all the TA participants

Category	Frame	Sentence No.	Total	Mean %	Total Mean %
1	Give PP	1	15	75	85
	Give DO	11	18	90	
	Lend PP	20	12	60	
	Lend DO	23	16	80	
2	Rent DO	3	5	25	40
	Sell DO	12	11	55	
3 (a)	Prn. Final	8	12	60	60
	Prn. Final	26	12	60	
(b)	V-to-prn.	*17	18	90	90
	V-to-prn.	*15	17	85	
(c)	V-prn.	2	20	100	90

	V-prn.	24	17	85	
4	PP NP	*7	20	100	100
	PP NP	*22	20	100	
5	Throw PP	4	15	75	65
	Throw DO	16	10	50	65
	Send PP	21	13	65	65
	Send DO	25	12	60	

A summary of the group statistics is shown in table 4:

Table 4
Summary of group statistics

	IV	N	Mean	Std. Dev
Category 1 DV	1	20	70	.47016
	2	20	75	.44426
Category 2 DV	1	20	70	.47016
	2	20	40	.50262
Category 3a DV	1	20	90	.30779
	2	20	60	.50262
Category 3b DV	1	20	85	.36635
	2	20	90	.30779
Category 3c DV	1	20	40	.50262
	2	20	90	.30779
Category 4 DV	1	20	85	.36635
	2	20	100	.00000
Category 5 DV	1	20	60	.50262
	2	20	65	.48936

In order to compare response accuracy rates, i.e. correct acceptance and correct rejection, of the two groups of participants, and given that the aim is to compare the means of two independent groups, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. The results are reported in table 5:

Table 5
Independent-Samples-Test Results

	t	df	Sig.	Mean dif.
Categ 1	.346	38	.73	.05000
Categ 2	1.949	38	.05	.30000
Categ 3a	2.276	31.49	.03	.300000
Categ 3b	.467	.38	.64	.05000
Categ 3c	.3.794	31.49	.00	.50000
Categ 4	1.831	19.000	.08	.15000
Categ 5	.319	38	.75	.05000

5.1. Summary of the Findings

-Category 1: As shown in tables (2 and 3), 70% of the BhA participants and 75% of the TA participants correctly accepted the PP and DO constructions with *Give* and *Lend*. The independent t-test (tables 4 and 5) shows no

significant difference in the scores for Group 1, BhA (M=70, SD= .47) and Group 2, TA (M= 75, SD= .44) conditions; $t(38) = .346$, $p = 0.73$.

-Category 2: 70% of the BhA participants against 40% of the TA participants correctly accepted DO (with two full NPs) with *Sell* and *Rent*. The independent t-test shows a significant difference in the scores for Group 1 (M=70, SD= .47) and Group 2 (M=40, SD= .50) conditions; $t(38) = 1.95$, $p = .05$.

-Category 3a: 90% of the BhA participants against 60% of the TA participants correctly accepted PP with pronouns in final position. The independent t-test shows a significant difference in the scores for Group 1, BhA (M=90, SD= .30) and Group 2, TA (M= 60, SD= .50) conditions; $t(31) = 2.28$, $p = .03$.

-Category 3b: 85% of the BhA participants and 90% of the TA participants correctly rejected V-to-pronoun constructions. The independent t-test shows no significant difference in the scores for Group 1, BhA (M=85, SD= .36) and Group 2, TA (M= 90, SD= .30) conditions; $t(38) = .46$, $p = .64$.

-Category 3c: 40% of the BhA participants against 90% of the TA participants correctly accepted V-pronoun constructions. The independent t-test shows a significant difference in the scores for Group 1, BhA (M=40, SD= .50) and Group 2, TA (M= 90, SD= .30) conditions; $t(31) = 3.79$, $p = .001$.

-Category 4: 85% of the BhA participants and 100% of the TA participants correctly rejected scrambled constructions. The independent t-test shows no significant difference in the scores for Group 1, BhA (M=85, SD= .36) and Group 2, TA (M= 100, SD= .000) conditions; $t(19) = 1.83$, $p = .08$.

-Category 5: 60% of the BhA participants and 65% of the TA participants correctly accepted the PP and DO constructions with *Throw* and *Send*. The independent t-test shows no significant difference in the scores for Group 1, BhA (M=60, SD= .50) and Group 2, TA (M= 65, SD= .48) conditions; $t(38) = .31$, $p = .75$.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

Looking more closely at the results displayed in tables (2 and 3), we can see that although, overall, the prediction of Category 1 is confirmed, the responses of the two groups are divided unevenly according to frame: For *Give*, in both BhA and TA, the DO percent is superior to the PP percent. This may be explained by the fact that *Give* is prototypical of DO. With *Lend*, we find a reverse picture: PP is more accepted than DO in BhA and less accepted in TA. A possible explanation is that TA *Lend* is a clear instance of *Give*-type verbs whereas, in BhA, it is only used in certain formal contexts (e.g. books), hence, it is treated differently from *Give* and similarly to the majority of verbs. The usual equivalent of *Lend* is *aTa (Give)*.

Category 2, which predicted BhA to be more accepting than TA, of DO with verbs like *Sell* and *Rent*, also, seems to be largely confirmed. The differences in the responses of the two groups are fairly proportionate: with *Rent*, 60% against 25%, with *Sell*, 80% against 55%.

Similarly, Category 3a, which predicted BhA higher acceptance of PP with pronouns in final position, is confirmed as 90% of the BhA participants against 60% of the TA participants correctly accepted pronoun-final

constructions; so is Category 3c where 40% (BhA) against 90% (TA) correctly accepted constructions where a pronoun is adjacent to the verb; as for V-to-pronoun constructions (Category 3b, an instance of scrambling), contrary to expectations, they were correctly rejected by 85% of the BhA and 90% of the TA participants. A possible explanation is that this constraint was learned as part of the general rule against scrambling (see below).

Contrary to expectations, whereby traces of scrambling will have remained by the end state, the results for Category 3b (above) and Category 4 (100% of TA learners and 85% of BhA learners correctly rejected scrambled structures) indicate that absence of scrambling has been noticed by both TA and BhA learners around this stage, in spite of the poverty of the stimulus. However, we still need to explain why noticing the absence of scrambling has resulted in different (preferred) sentence structures with pronominals: in BhA: Prn-final is preferred; in TA: V-prn is preferred. For concreteness, why is, for example, *He sent a letter to him* preferred over *He sent him a letter*? A possible explanation is that in BhA, the object pronoun is independent of the verb, but cliticizes on to the preposition (subsection 2), which explains the non-omission of the preposition (cf. *Tarrash la-hu (sent to-him)/ gaT 'ali-ha (threw to-her)*). This, presumably, results in English preposition-pronoun-final constructions, once the prohibition against the scrambled structure has been noticed. In TA, on the other hand, *He sent him a letter* is preferred over *He sent a letter to him* as the object pronoun is part of the verbal element in TA (subsection 2) and hence, remains adjacent to the verb (cf. *b'ath-l-u (sent-to-him) / lawwaH-l-u (threw-to-him)*). This results in English V-pronoun constructions.

In this connection, another question requiring an explanation is: Why should absence of scrambling be noticed by both groups of learners but not DO with two full NPs with verbs like *Rent* and *Sell* by TA learners (Category 2)? Again I can only speculate by saying that, as absence of scrambling is a general phenomenon applying to all types of verbs, negative evidence (classroom correction) will have been provided in the classroom. This is not the case with DO with two full NPs as this only affects a few verbs such as *Rent* and *Sell* which may never be encountered in the classroom.

Finally, Category 5 predicted some difficulty with DO (owing to reassembly requirements), for both groups, that may be overcome by the end state. The results, i.e. the low percentages of correct acceptance (60% and 65% respectively), seem to support this conclusion.

All in all, what all this indicates is that the effect of dialectal difference (i.e. varieties of the same L1) on acceptance/rejection of L2 constructions is determined by the amount of feature reassembly required: dialectal difference has no effect on accuracy rates when reassembling features is either not required or easily achievable in the two varieties (categories 1, 3b, 4 and 5). On the other hand, it seems to have an effect on accuracy rates (as demonstrated by the independent t-test) when the two varieties behave differently with respect to feature reassembly (categories 2, 3a and 3c). This confirms our argument that the degree of difficulty in L2 acquisition is also sensitive to dialectal difference.

To conclude, we have proposed a feature-based account for the L1 Arabic-L2 English dative constructions. We have, also, argued that the FRA, which

takes the degree of difficulty in L2 acquisition to correspond to the particular L1-L2 pairings can be further supported by the finding that this may also be true of different varieties of the same L1. To do so, we have investigated Lardiere's claim about transfer by examining speakers of different varieties of the same L1 learning L2 English dative constructions. The results of a GJ test have shown that speakers of different varieties of the same L1 may face different kinds of difficulty with L2 acquisition, lending further support to Lardiere's conclusion.

This, in turn, gives more weight to the validity of the FRA and its ability to provide important insights into the process of L2 acquisition.

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Appendix

Dear Student

In this activity, you will read 28 sentences, one after the other, and judge their grammatical correctness in the following way:

Using your initial impression (intuition) of each sentence, circle either *Acceptable* or *Unacceptable* (to help you choose between the two alternatives, say to yourself: would this sentence be said by a native speaker of English?):

1. The teacher gave the book to the student:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

2. John sent her the letter:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

3. The landlord rented the student the room:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

4. The goal keeper threw the ball to the player:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

5. The driver put the car in the garage:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

6. They bought Peter a birthday cake:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

7. The man threw to the boy the ball:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

8. John threw the ball to her:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

9. The result of the test remains unknown:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

10. That soup smells delicious:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

11. The teacher gave the student the book:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

12. The driver sold Peter the car:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

13. The dog dreams about chasing rabbits:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

14. She is listening to her favorite band:

Acceptable **Unacceptable**

15. John sent to her the letter:
Acceptable Unacceptable

16. The goal keeper threw the player the ball:
Acceptable Unacceptable

17. John threw to her the ball:
Acceptable Unacceptable

18. Rabbits destroy his garden every year:
Acceptable Unacceptable

19. The guards painted the roses red:
Acceptable Unacceptable

20. He lent the car to his daughter:
Acceptable Unacceptable

21. Peter sent a letter to his father:
Acceptable Unacceptable

22. He shot to the player the ball:
Acceptable Unacceptable

23. He lent his daughter the car:
Acceptable Unacceptable

24. John threw her the ball:
Acceptable Unacceptable

25. Peter sent his father a letter:
Acceptable Unacceptable

26. John sent the letter to her:
Acceptable Unacceptable

27. John borrowed a pen from his classmate:
Acceptable Unacceptable

28. The clown got the children too excited:
Acceptable Unacceptable