

## Thai Learners' Acquisition of English Dative Constructions: Evidence for the Absence of L1 Transfer

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### APA Citation:

Pongyoo, T., & Singhapreecha, P. (2023). Thai learners' acquisition of English dative constructions: Evidence for the absence of L1 transfer. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 16(2), 737-751.

Received 10/02/2023	<b>ABSTRACT</b>
Received in revised form 28/06/2023	This study investigated Thai EFL learners' acquisition of English dative constructions, i.e., Prepositional Dative (PD) and Double Object (DO) constructions employing Radford's (2004) Minimalist accounts as a framework and Acceptability Judgment as a task. Two hypotheses were formulated. Firstly, the English PD would be accepted more readily than the English DO, due to the availability of PDs in both languages and the absence of DOs, by English standards, in Thai. Secondly, if there was L1 transfer, English counterparts of Thai DO and Thai Serial Verb constructions (SVC) would be initially accepted at a greater rate than English DOs. At later stages, given access to UG and adequate L2 input, the English DO would be accepted more significantly than the Thai DO and Thai SVC. Participants consisted of three groups of Thai EFL learners (beginning, intermediate, and upper intermediate). Results largely confirm both hypotheses. Particularly, Thai DOs and SVCs were rejected substantially from the intermediate learners onwards. This shows that the initial transfer of Thai DO and SVCs did not occur. Therefore, this study does not support Full Transfer at the initial stage (contra Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996). This study suggests L2 learners' indecision on the target L2 structure at the early stage and progress to attainment at later stages, in line with Wakabayashi's Lexical Learning and Lexical Transfer hypothesis (2009), and accessibility to UG at large.
Accepted 05/07/2023	<b>Keywords:</b> SLA, prepositional dative, double objects, Thai learners, absence of L1 transfer

## Introduction

The English dative constructions involve a single semantically related event that can be expressed in two different syntactic constructions: Prepositional Dative (PD), as in (1), and Double Object (DO) constructions, as in (2).

- (1) John gave Mary a book.
- (2) John gave a book to Mary.

The dative alternation (DA) between two constructions is of interest to the study of English as a second language. DA is a property of certain verbs such as *give*, *show*, and *throw*, and this alternation is not applicable to other verbs despite having related meanings, such as *donate*, *present*, and *pitch*. The major interest in SLA research has been on the knowledge of L2 speakers regarding constraints that allow certain verbs to be alternated but bars others from undergoing the alternation. Pinker (1989) suggests that phonological and morphological rules constrain DA. The phonological rule allows DA for verbs with either monosyllabic or disyllabic words in which the primary stress is on the first syllable, and the morphological rule which disallows DA for certain verbs, including Latinate ones. In respect of L1 acquisition, these rules present the learnability puzzle, evident from initial DA overgeneralization by English speaking children to non-alterable verbs (Pinker, 1989; Whong-Barr & Schwartz, 2002). In terms of structural acquisition, Snyder & Stromswold (1997) compiled the data of the first PD and DO occurrences produced by English speaking children, aged 1;4 to 2;6, from CHILDES. The results show a significant PD-DO correlation, but neither of them occurred significantly sooner than the other. Due to the DA overgeneralization to illicit verbs by English speaking children, SLA research in English dative verbs has extensively investigated the ability of L2 speakers to alternate these correlated constructions. In L2 research, the overgeneralization is based on pairs of related verbs (e.g. *tell* and *whisper*). Inagaki (1997) found Chinese and Japanese speakers were able to distinguish licit *tell* DO from illicit *whisper* DO. However, Whong-Barr & Schwartz (2002) found the overgeneralization of Korean and Japanese speakers to illicit verbs (i.e. *demonstrate*, *explain*, and *whisper*). In addition to testing L2 speakers' knowledge of the DA constraints, Inagaki (1997) also predicted the alternation based on the first language of speakers. Because of the availability in L1, he predicted the Chinese group would accept *tell* DO, but the Japanese group would not. The results revealed both groups accepted *tell* DO with high scores. Whong-Barr & Schwartz (2002) predicted that Korean speakers would accept the alternation of *for*-dative verbs, but Japanese speakers would reject those verbs in DO. They found that Japanese speakers accepted *for*-dative DO at a higher rate (70%) than Korean speakers (14%).

The previous studies with the central assumption on the overgeneralization yield results that remain unsettled (Inagaki, 1997; Whong-Barr & Schwartz, 2002). Instead of checking if a DO verb is overextended to non-DO verbs in L2 grammars, we opted for examining if UG availability of a structure such as the PD in the L1 would assist the learning of this structure in the L2. In addition, we investigated the unavailability of an L2 structure such as the DO if it would be acquired by L2 learners.

Our queries are similar to those posed by Yoshimura et al. (2016) and Teeranate & Singhapreecha (2022), who investigated English Control and Raising structures with Japanese and Thai EFL learners, respectively. Japanese and Thai both exhibit Control and neither has Raising. Yoshimura et al. (2016) found that their participants' performance on Control was more accurate than Raising and attribute the findings of ease and difficulty of Control vs. Raising to positive and negative effects provided by UG (Universal Grammar), in accordance with Schwartz & Sprouse's (1996) Full Transfer/Full Access approach. In Teeranate & Singhapreecha (2022), a cross-sectional study with three different proficient groups (Lower Intermediate, Intermediate, and Upper

Intermediate) of Thai learners was conducted. Their results indicate accuracy on Control across groups and a development pattern on Raising (with 21%, 51%, and 73% accuracies in the three respective groups). Teeranate & Singhapreecha (2022) attribute their findings with respect to Control to UG accessibility and L1 transfer. With regard to Raising, they address that the development pattern suggests that UG operates but is restricted to marked properties of the L2 such as Raising with a PP intervention.

Parallel to Yoshimura et al. (2016) and Teeranate & Singhapreecha (2022), we attempted to provide evidence to a primary question of whether UG is accessible to L2 learners and conditions that may restrict the accessibility of UG.

### Present study

#### Objectives

The present study investigated the acquisition of English dative constructions by L2 learners. The L1 under study is Thai. Thai is particularly interesting, since it exhibits PD constructions as in English, but the English DO, in which the indirect object precedes the direct object, is unavailable in Thai. In accordance with these similar and different properties, the objectives of the current study were, firstly, to find out whether, the PD structure would be acquired more readily than the English DO structure, and secondly, to assess if Thai EFL learners, particularly those with high proficiency, would be able to perform the English DO construction relatively well, if the English hierarchical structure of Goal preceding Theme was accessible.

#### Theoretical background and hypotheses

In this section, we present the derivations of English Prepositional Dative and Double Object constructions featuring Radford's (2004) approach in the framework of the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995). We depict how Thai PD and DO counterparts of English could be derived under Minimalism as well. Radford's Minimalist approach to English DO and PD is relatively simple and straightforward. It is inspired by VP-Shell (Larson, 1988), an underlying structure that is widely held for double objects in the literature. These theoretical backgrounds serve as the basis for formulating the hypotheses.

#### ***English Prepositional Dative and Double Object Constructions***

Radford's (2004) accounts for PD and DO constructions have been inspired by a transitive structure in (3), reproduced from his (32b) page 263, below.

(3) The ball will roll down the hill

The verb *roll* in (3) requires two arguments – *the ball* and *down the hill*. Semantically, *the ball* bears a Theme role; it is an entity that is about to undergo the rolling. When (3) is extended to (4), reproduced from (32a) page 263, below, *the ball* retains the Theme role, but *the ball* in (4) is about to be rolled by a causer *they* that occupies the matrix subject position.

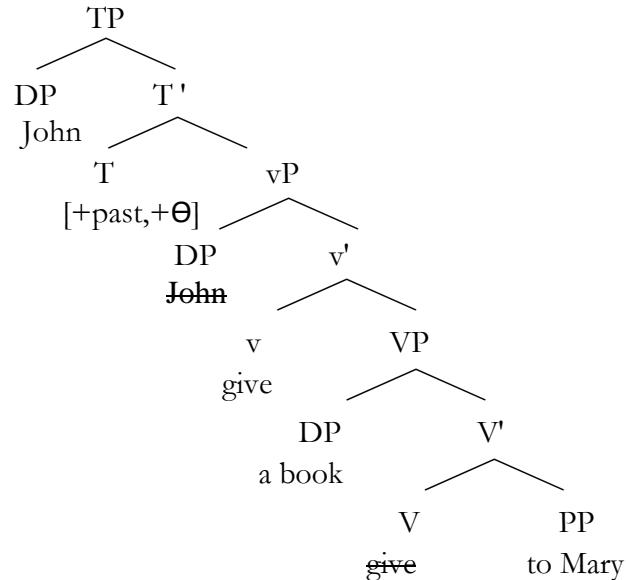
(4) They will roll the ball down the hill.

In (3), *the ball* fills the matrix subject position, while in (4) it appears in the post-verbal position, one that an object typically occupies in a transitive sentence. If Baker's 1988 Uniform Theta Assignment Hypothesis/UTAH, in which thematic structure should be mapped consistently with syntactic structure, is to comply with UG principles, then *the ball* in (4) ought to be a subject, rather than an object. Radford's alternative to such an inconsistency is that *the ball* can remain a

subject, but in a VP-Shell, with an inner (lower) and upper VP structure (Hale & Keyser 1993; Larson, 1988). According to Radford (2004), that *roll* precedes *the ball* is enabled by movement of *roll* as the head of the lower VP to adjoin to the upper (null) V head, due to its causative feature strength, across *the ball* in the subject position of the VP-Shell. The head that has this causative feature strength is a light verb, which, in English such as (5), does not have phonetic content.

Radford (2004) extends the VP-Shell structure in association with the raising of a lexical verb to the light verb to derive sentences with other transitive verbs including *give*. The VP-Shell is constructed by two-layered VPs, where the lower V head at the beginning of the derivation has a phonetic content while the upper light v is phonetically null, but it has a strong causative feature. A schematic output in (5) illustrates the derivation of a PD sentence such as (2).

(5)

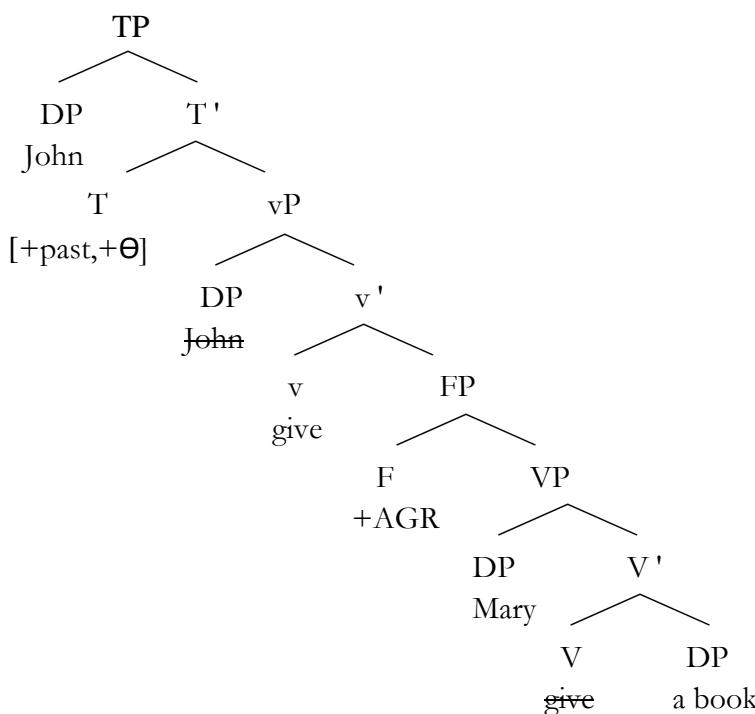


With respect to (5), initially the lower V head *give* is merged with PP *to Mary*, after which the V' *give to Mary* is merged with DP *a book*. The V' *give to Mary* is reminiscent of Larson's (1988) remark in the spirit of Chomsky (1975) that *give-to-Mary* can be considered a small predicate of *a book*, an inner subject.<sup>1</sup> If Larson's (1988) remark is tenable, *a book* is eligible to be a subject, filling Spec,VP of the lower VP layer. Subsequently, the VP *a book give to Mary* is merged with a null causative light verb v', which according to Radford, has an affixal nature and a strong V-feature. The strong V-feature of the v' attracts the lexical content of the lower V to adjoin to it, after which the trace of *give* deletes. The v' is further merged with DP *John*, the matrix subject, filling Spec,vP. That *John* originates within VP (or vP in this particular case) is consistent with the commonly held VP-Internal Subject Hypothesis (Koopman & Sportiche, 1991); this interim step results in vP *John give a book to Mary*. Finally, vP is merged with T which hosts *phi*-features (third person and singularity, marked by Θ) and finite T (past tense), resulting in TP. As English has a strong N feature of T (i.e., Case) *John* raises from Spec,vP into Spec,TP, where nominative Case is checked to allow convergence, with the deletion of *John*'s trace.

Semantically, in the post-verbal constituents in PD constructions such as (5) the direct object, whose theta role is Theme, precedes a prepositional phrase where the indirect object is embedded. This indirect object bears the Goal role, which, as Radford (2004) defines, refers to an entity towards which something moves. If the preposition is put aside, the post-verbal PD's semantic structure is characterized by Theme preceding Goal, following a canonical pattern such as Carrier-Duncan's (1985) thematic hierarchy -- AGENT > THEME > GOAL > OBLIQUES.

In English DO constructions such as (6), on the basis of Radford's (2004) account, the vP-over-VP structure is employed, similar to the PD structure. As shown schematically in (6), *give* originates in the lower V, and merges with DP *a book*, forming V' *give a book*.

(6)



Next, the *V' give a book* is merged with *DP Mary*, resulting in *VP Mary give a book*. This interim result has the direct object in the complement of *V*, and the indirect object *Mary* in *Spec,VP*. That *a book* fills the complement position is typical of a transitive structure with a single complement. As for *Mary*, its eligibility in *Spec,VP* is associated with a theoretical perspective. It has been proposed that object agreement exists in a clause structure (cf. Baker, 2013). According to Baker (2013), an FP (functional projection) for object agreement may project between *vP* and *VP*. The *F* head has features that agree with those of the object in a single object construction, or those of the higher (indirect) object in a double object construction. To enable such object agreement, it is necessary that the *F* head c-commands *VP*, so it can probe into the matching features. Thus, *Mary* fills *Spec,VP*, and consequently, probing into object agreement is accomplished. In the remaining derivation, the *VP* (or *FP* if object agreement is applicable) is merged with a null causative light verb, followed by the raising of *give* to adjoin to the upper light verb due to the strong causative light verb's feature. Subsequently, *vP* is merged with *T*, and the raising of *John* into *Spec,TP* follows, in the same fashion as depicted in the derivation of (5).

In terms of thematic hierarchy, the linear order of the post-verbal constituents of (6) exhibits Goal preceding Theme, an order that is inconsistent with the canonical pattern above. This inconsistency may pose a problem to L2 learners whose L1 does not use these types of double objects such as Thai.

### Thai Prepositional Dative and Double Object Constructions

With respect to Thai PD constructions such as (7) below, the derivation of an English PD such as (5) can presumably apply as the word order pattern and the resulting meaning, as shown in (7), is the same as that of (5).

(7) somchay hay nă̄ŋsă̄w kɛ̄ suda  
 Somchai give book to Suda  
 “Somchai gave a book to Suda.”

The instance of *hāy* in (7) is used as a main verb, corresponding to English *give*. In line with the general practice, we assume there exists a layer of vP over VP, TP or IP (Inflectional Phrase) can be assumed since Thai has a complex aspectual system (cf. Koenig & Muansuwan (2005).<sup>2</sup> The merging operations and the raising of the lower V to adjoin to the upper (causative) light verb depicted for English should also be applicable. It is plausible that there is movement of *sōmchay* from Spec,vP to Spec, IP. In Simpson's (2001) analysis of Thai constructions with a predicate-final modal *dāy*, the DP subject originates in the specifier of the head *dāy*, where it receives a theta-role, and raises into Spec,TP to check strong EPP (Extended Projection Principle) features. Parallel to Simpson's (2001) approach, the DP *sōmchay* presumably receives an Agent role via the raised V and moves into Spec,TP, due to EPP feature strengths.

In addition to being a main verb, *hāy* can be used as part of a serial verb construction. According to Muansuwan (2002) and Sudmuk (2005), the serial verb construction (SVC) consists of a string of verbs, with the subject of the first verb also serving as the subject of the following verbs. An instance of *hāy* in a serial verb construction is shown in (8) below. Note that we glossed *hāy* as *give* to be faithful to the literal meaning, although by English standards, it is compatible with the preposition *for*. Sentence (8) involves serialization where the matrix subject is *Suda* and the serial verb includes the matrix verb *suíu* and its (discontinuous) affixal element *hāy*. The matrix subject serves as the subject of both *suíu* and *hāy*. Given the meaning, *hāy* in (8) is not the main verb but serves as the marker for *Somchai* --the beneficiary of the buying sweets event. Semantically, after the matrix verb Theme *k<sup>h</sup>anom* precedes Goal *sōmchay*, with the intervention of *hāy*.

(8) sudaan suíu k<sup>h</sup>anom hāy sōmchay  
 Suda buy sweets give Somchai  
 “Suda bought some sweets for Somchai.”

The status of *hāy* as part of SVCs plausibly remains in sentences such as (9), where *hāy* does not appear as an affix, but in the matrix verb position. Semantically, the post-verbal constituents carry Theme and Goal roles, respectively.

(9) sudaan hāy k<sup>h</sup>anom sōmchay  
 Suda give sweets Somchai  
 “Suda gave some sweets to Somchai/Suda gave Somchai some sweets.”

We want to establish that *hāy* in (9) is derived from a serialized element. To this end, data from Mandarin Chinese, in which the literal element *give* can show up as an affixal as well, is worth consideration. In sentence (10), reproduced from Hornstein et al.'s, page 100, *ba* is considered an overt light verb, and *gei* the content element expresses the main verb reading.

(10) Zhangsan ba shu gei wo  
 Zhangsan take book give me  
 “Zhangsan gave the book to me.”

Hornstein et al. (2006) note that (10) is different from English in that it has an overt light verb, i.e., *ba*. Obviously, the resulting reading is derived from *gei*, and (10) is a serial verb construction. The fact that *Zhangsan* serves as the subject of both *ba* and *gei* suggests this point. Sentence (10) is parallel to the Thai (11) below, in which the discontinuous element *hāy* is the element that expresses the meaningful content.

(11) sudaan aw k<sup>h</sup>anōm hāy sōmchay  
 Suda take sweets give Somchai  
 “Suda took some sweets and gave them to Somchai/Suda gave Somchai some sweets.”

An alternative structure of (11), which has a similar meaning is (9). Presumably, Thai has two alternatives with respect to the instance of *hây* as a serialized element, i.e., one where the phonetically realized light verb appears separately from *hây* as in (11) and the other in which the null light verb appears originally and is subsequently adjoined to by *hây*, which has moved across the direct object *k<sup>h</sup>anom*, as in (9). Note that *k<sup>h</sup>anom hây sômchay* could be a small clause, where Theme precedes Goal, intervened by the affixal *hây* (to be associated with the null light verb). The sequence of the direct preceding indirect object is consistent with the way the two (serial) verbs, as a discontinuous predicate, are distributed in relation to Theme and Goal. The relevant derivation is depicted in (12).

(12) a. [sc *k<sup>h</sup>anom hây sômchay*]  
 b. ----> [vP *e* [sc *k<sup>h</sup>anom hây sômchay*]]  
 c. ----> [vP *hây* [sc *k<sup>h</sup>anom hây sômchay*]]

As shown by (12a) and (12b), a small clause *k<sup>h</sup>anom hây sômchay* is merged with a null light verb (*e*), after which *hây* raises to adjoin with *e* due to the strong light verb feature. The resulting word order, as shown in (12c), is *hây k<sup>h</sup>anom sômchay*. The remaining derivation, i.e., the merger of this vP with *Suda* in Spec,vP, the following merger of vP with TP, and the movement of *Suda* into Spec,TP, apply, similar to the relevant part of the derivation of (7).

The data (8), (9), and (11) and the depicted derivations suggest that Thai has both overt serialized constructions, in which the matrix verb is occupied by a given overt light verb, e.g., (8) and (11), and derived serialized constructions, e.g., (9), where the matrix verb is derived, via the raising of *hây* to adjoin with the null light verb. Hereafter, we will call the former Thai SVC and the latter Thai Double Object (DO). Notably, a Thai DO contains two adjacent NPs bearing Theme and Goal roles. This order is fixed; the opposite order, in which Goal precedes Theme in English DOs, is ungrammatical. As shown above, English and Thai are similar in exhibiting PD structure. Viewed from a UG (Universal Grammar) perspective, it is likely that UG provides L2 learners with the layered vP-over-VP structure and the merging operation of a PP with the lexical V head along with the raising of the lexical verb to the light verb. With respect to the DO structure, Thai utilizes a serial verb construction, with the rigid word order of Theme preceding Goal, while English has the vP-over-VP structure and the hierachal structure of Goal preceding Theme. Presumably, the Thai serialization and the English hierarchical structure of Goal dominating Theme are options that are available in UG. As the English DO option is different from that of the L1, Thai learners of English are likely to suppress the serialized/small clause structure of the L1 and internalize the new hierarchical structure to produce English DO constructions. To guide us on our investigation of Thai learners' performance of the English PD and DO constructions, we formulate two hypotheses as follows.

**Hypothesis 1:** Theoretically, the availability of the merger of PP with a lexical verb and the raising of the lexical verb to the light v in both Thai and English PDs would assist the learning of PD. Different mechanisms, i.e., serialization vs. the layered-VP with Goal preceding Theme that apply to Thai and English DOs, might pose a challenge to Thai L2 learners when encountering English DOs. Thai learners, regardless of proficiency levels, would accept the PD constructions at a greater rate than the DO constructions.

**Hypothesis 2:** Thai learners presumably were initially influenced by L1 structures. Thai learners in the early stage of L2 development would accept Thai DOs and SVCs at a higher rate than English DOs. When the proficiency increased, they would accept the target English DO and reject the Thai DO and SVC.

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## Experimental Design

In this section, the research methodology is described.

### Participants

#### *Native English Speakers*

Five native English speaking volunteers served as controlled participants. All were international faculty teaching English as a foreign language at a public university in Bangkok, Thailand. They ranged in age between 45-58, with a mean age of 48.

#### *Thai EFL Learners*

The participants in this study were 60 Thai student volunteers from two universities and one high school in Bangkok, aged between 18-20 years old. The participants completed a Macmillan Placement Test (Kerr et al., 2012). The test in multiple-choice format consists of 50 questions, testing on grammar and vocabulary. The branding criteria provided by the publisher were adapted to represent three proficiency groups, i.e., beginning (score below 25), intermediate (score below 40), and upper intermediate (score above 40). Twenty participants were obtained to fill each proficiency level. The average placement test scores of the beginning, intermediate, and upper intermediate groups were 18.5 ( $SD=3.1$ ), 32.15 ( $SD=3.94$ ), and 43.4 ( $SD=2.48$ ), respectively. They were placed into three proficiency groups, based on the branding criteria provided by the publisher, i.e., beginning, intermediate, and upper intermediate. The number of participants in each group was 20.

#### *Acceptability Judgment Task*

A 5-point Likert scale Acceptability Judgment (AJ) test was implemented. The subjects were asked to rate the randomized acceptability of 50 sentences, consisting of 24 target sentences and 26 fillers. These sentences were constructed around four dative verbs – *give*, *tell*, *hand*, and *send*, which were able to appear in the PD and DO contexts. There were 8 PD, 8 DO, 4 English counterparts of Thai DO and another 4 English counterparts of Thai SVC items. (For convenience, the English counterparts of Thai SVC and DO sentences will be referred to as Thai SVC and Thai DO.) See the appendix for the 24 test sentences. Sentences (13), (14), (15), and (16) illustrate the PD, DO, and English counterparts of Thai DO and Thai SVC structures employed in the AJ task. The Likert scale employed in the AJ task is shown below sentence (13). Sentence (15) is ungrammatical in English but the presence of the direct object prior to the indirect object is grammatical in Thai. Sentence (16) is also ungrammatical in English. The intended reading is *Tom sent a poster to his customer*. The preposition *to* was replaced by *give* to imitate Thai SVCs such as (8) above, where the matrix verb and the small clause verb are filled by the first serial verb and the affixal verb *hâj*, with the literal meaning of *give*.

(13) Peter sent the orchids to his girlfriend

-2 ----- -1 ----- 0 ----- +1 ----- +2  
Highly Unacceptable      Unable to decide      Highly Acceptable

(14) Lisa sent her teacher a document.

(15) \*Vanessa sent a long memo her staff.

(16) \*Tom sent a poster give his customer.

All of the test sentences including fillers were checked by a native English speaker for grammatical and syntactic anomalies. Following this, the alternation between PD and DO of the target sentences were verified to avoid bias to either of the constructions. All of the sentences were randomized and printed into two forms of questionnaire. The AJ sessions were conducted in a paper-and-pencil fashion and interpretations of each scale were provided. For example, Highly Acceptable (2) was to be chosen when the participant could confidently use that structure to express the sentence. On the contrary, Highly Unacceptable (-2) was to be chosen when the participant would never use that structure to express the sentence. It took approximately 25 minutes for the Thai EFL participants to complete the AJ task.

## Results

### ***Controlled Participants' Judgments***

The controlled participants accepted the PD, DO, and the English counterparts of Thai DO at 1.5, 1.9, and -.7 points (on the scale of -2 to 2), respectively. These values were compatible with the levels of moderately acceptable, highly acceptable, and unacceptable, proximate to our expectations. As this task involved degrees of acceptability, slight inconsistencies in degrees of acceptability occurred, which could have been a matter of infrequencies in association with these items, particularly regarding some instances of PD. These notwithstanding, the native speakers' performance was on target.

### ***Thai EFL Learners' Judgments***

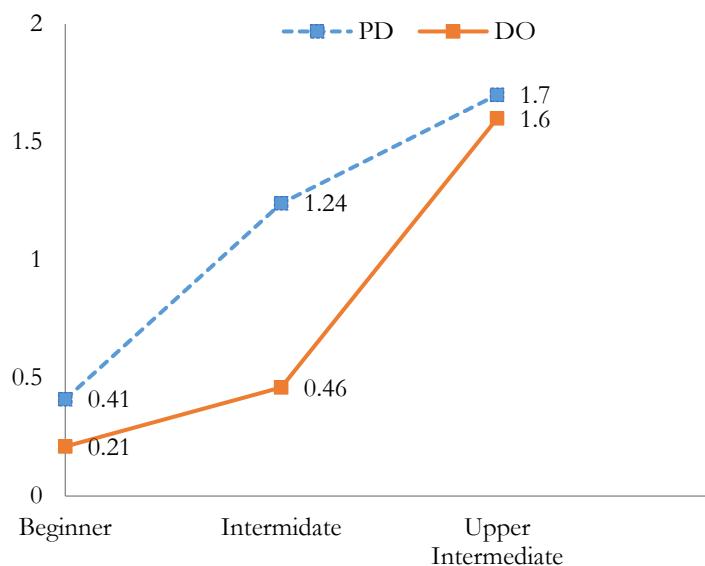
#### ***Results for Hypothesis 1***

It was found that the knowledge of PD was substantially different from that of DO. As shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, PD started minimally at the initial stage (.41) but developed markedly in the intermediate and upper intermediate stages (1.24 and 1.70). Unlike PD, DO progressed slowly across the beginning and intermediate stages (.21 and .46) but rose dramatically at the latest stage (1.60).

**Table 1**  
*Mean Acceptance Scores of PD and DO by Proficiency Level*

English Proficiency				
	Beginner	Intermediate	Upper Intermediate	Average
PD	.41 <sub>(.76)</sub>	1.24 <sub>(.66)</sub>	1.70 <sub>(.37)</sub>	1.12 <sub>(.81)</sub>
DO	.21 <sub>(.80)</sub>	.46 <sub>(.81)</sub>	1.60 <sub>(.68)</sub>	.76 <sub>(.97)</sub>
N	20	20	20	

*Note.* Numbers in the parentheses represent standard deviations.

**Figure 1***Mean Acceptance Scores of PD and DO*

Results from ANOVAs showed that the participants' acceptance of PD was significantly greater than that of DO ( $F(1, 57) = 11.96, p < .002$ ), confirming the first hypothesis. The interaction between the two structures and the proficiency level was significant ( $F(2, 57) = 4.05, p < .03$ ). The interaction effect was likely to result from a steady rise in accuracy in DO vs. a sharp increase in accuracy in PD at the intermediate stage and subsequent accuracy in both structures at the latest stage. Tukey's HSD and Bonferroni's post-hoc tests revealed significant differences between proficiency levels on PD and DO. The beginners' judgments were different from those of the intermediate and the upper intermediate (at  $p < .02$  and  $p < .001$ , respectively), and the intermediate learners' judgments were different from those of the upper intermediate ( $p < .001$ ), confirming the role of proficiency.

**Results for Hypothesis 2**

ANOVAs comparing the three structures – English DO, Thai DO, and Thai SVC – were performed per group. Results as shown in Table 2 indicated a non-significant difference among the acceptance rates of the three structures at the beginning level ( $F(2, 19) = 1.209, p = .310$ ) and significant differences at the intermediate and upper intermediate level ( $F(2, 19) = 12.713, p < .001$ ;  $F(2, 19) = 156.044, p < .001$ ), respectively. In the intermediate group's data, pairwise comparisons showed a significant difference between English DO and Thai SVC ( $p < .001$ ), and Thai DO and Thai SVC ( $p < .002$ ). In the upper intermediate group's data, pairwise comparisons showed a significant difference between all the pair members, i.e., English DO and Thai DO ( $p < .001$ ), Thai DO and Thai SVC ( $p < .002$ ), and English DO and Thai SVC ( $p < .001$ ). Evidently, the beginning learners did not prefer the Thai DO and SVC to the English DO, which did not support the L1 transfer part of the hypothesis. The intermediate and upper intermediate learners were largely able to distinguish between the acceptable English DO and the unacceptable Thai DO and SVC, consistent with the hypothesis.

With respect to mean acceptance and rejection scores, as Table 2 and Figure 2 illustrate, the beginning group accepted English and Thai DOs minimally (between .2 to .4) and was unable to decide on the acceptability of the Thai SVC. The intermediate group showed a sign in favor of the L2, that is they accepted the English DO with a higher score (.462) more than the Thai DO (.113), and

rejected the Thai SVC substantially (-.839). The upper intermediate group strongly rejected the Thai DO (-1.25) and SVC (-1.9) and strongly accepted the English DO (1.60).

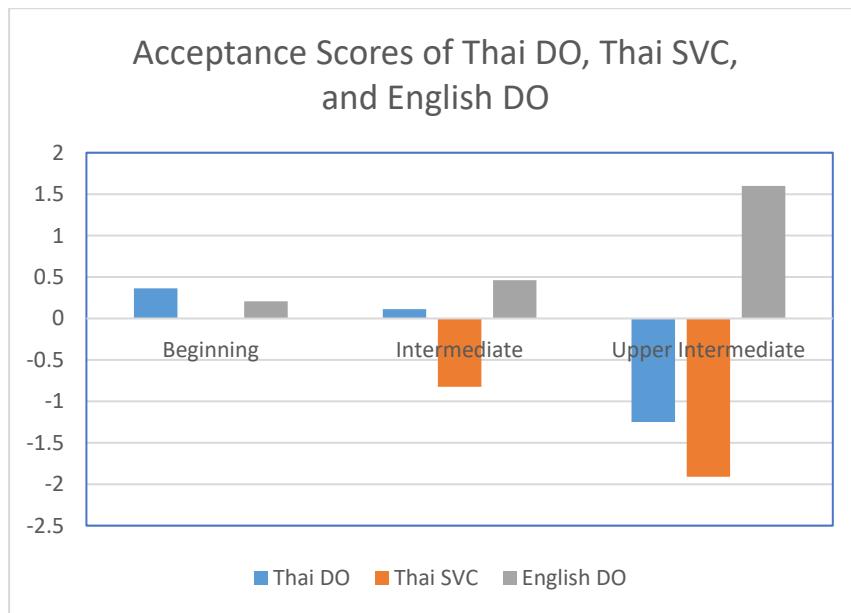
**Table 2**

*Average Acceptance Scores and F-values of ThaiDO, ThaiSVC, and English DO by Proficiency Level*

Group		Mean	SD	F-Value	Significance
<b>Beginning</b>	ThaiDO	.363	.547		
	ThaiSVC	.000	.760		
	EnglishDO	.207	.801	1.209	.310
<b>Intermediate</b>	ThaiDO	.113	.853		
	ThaiSVC	-.825	.839		
	EnglishDO	.462	.811	12.713	.001
<b>Upper Intermediate</b>	ThaiDO	-1.25	.889		
	ThaiSVC	-1.91	.168		
	EnglishDO	1.60	.683	156.044	.001

**Figure 2**

*Average Acceptance Scores of ThaiDO, ThaiSVC, and English DO by Proficiency Level*



## Discussion

In the present study, we hypothesized that Thai EFL learners, would acquire PDs more readily than DOs due to the availability of PDs in both languages and the absence of DOs in Thai. In addition, if there were L1 transfer of the Thai DO, the less proficient learners would accept English counterparts of Thai DOs and Thai SVCs more than English DOs initially. In contrast, the more proficient learners were expected to accept English DOs more significantly than the English counterparts of the Thai DOs and SVCs.

Results of the study confirm the first hypothesis. In particular, given a layered-VP, the merging of a PP with the lexical verb in the lower V, whose specifier hosts a Theme DP, and the raising of the verb to adjoin with the upper light verb, due to its strong feature, operate within the grammatical system of the Thai learners. The DO construction, in comparison with PD, was apparently slow during the initial stages but rose significantly, close to the PD at the later stage, suggesting a development pattern toward attainment of the L2.

Compared to a similar pattern found in Yoshimura et al. (2016) and Teeranate & Singhapreecha (2022), this trend toward L2 attainment is clearer. It is plausible that English Raising (with PP intervention) in Yoshimura et al. (2016) and Teeranate & Singhapreecha (2022) is a more marked structure than English Double Object constructions. Theoretically, English Raising is relatively complex; the sentential subject is derived via raising from the infinitival subject across a PP, containing an Experiencer. English Double Object construction does not involve a phrasal movement. However, there is movement of the lexical verb to the light verb position, which is common across PDs and DOs. The layered-VP structure, where Spec,VP and the complement of V are occupied by the indirect object (Goal) and the direct object (Theme), could be less marked than the underlying representation of raising predicates. Given the varying structural complexity of the DO and Raising constructions, L2 learners are likely to achieve more accuracy on the DO than the Raising construction, as the evidence in this study shows.

With respect to the second hypothesis, the non-significant difference in acceptance rates among the Thai DO, Thai SVC and English DO revealed by the beginning groups' data suggest the absence of L1 transfer, inconsistent with Schwartz & Sprouse's (1996) Full Transfer hypothesis. The significant differences in the acceptability judgment results obtained from the intermediate and upper intermediate groups, along with the mean acceptance of the English DO and rejection of the Thai DO and SVC confirm their knowledge of the target L2 DO structure. As noted above, there was a developmental pattern which was slow initially, but improved markedly at the later stage, in which the English DO was almost fully achieved. Given our findings, the initial L2 stage is characterized by indecision between the serialized structure in the L1 and the layered VP structure in the L2. At later stages, presumably after L2 learners have had adequate exposure to relevant input, the L2 grammar acquires the layered-VP with the filled specifier and the complement identical to the target structure. This acquisition pattern is largely in line with Wakabayashi's (2009) Lexical Learning and Lexical Transfer (LLLT) approach. According to the LLLT approach, which has a basis in the Minimalist framework (Chomsky, 1995), the early stages involve variability in L2 productions. The acquisition pattern proceeds when the learner assembles an L2 feature to a lexical item and includes the lexical item in the numeration. In this respect, a Thai L2 learner presumably starts with noticing a feature of English DO (during the stage of variability) and assembles this feature with a lexical item such as *give*. At a later stage, a high ratio of the assembly and the inclusion of the DO *give* in the numeration enables the learner to perceive and produce *give* in L2 constructions on target. Our data support L2 learners' accessibility to UG, via the acquisition of a formal feature in association with Double Object predicates.

## Conclusion

This study investigated Thai EFL learners' knowledge of English Prepositional Dative and Double Object constructions. Thai and English exhibit PDs. They differ in that in regard to the Thai DO, the direct object (Theme) precedes the indirect object (Goal), while the English DO relevant part has the reversal pattern. It was hypothesized that Thai learners of English would accept English PDs more readily than English DOs, and that the English counterparts of Thai DOs and SVCs would be accepted initially while the English DOs would be accepted at a later stage. Having employed Acceptability Judgment and recruited 60 Thai EFL participants of different proficiency levels, results largely confirmed both hypotheses, with an exception that there was no L1 transfer in the initial stage of the acquisition of English DOs. This study suggests UG availability and the assistance of UG when the L1 and the L2 have similar properties. In the absence of an L2 structure, such as the English DO, L2 learners are indecisive on the target L2 structure initially, but are able to achieve it at a later stage. This development pattern is largely in line with the Lexical Learning and Lexical Transfer hypothesis (cf. Wakabayashi, 2009), in which variability occurs initially, and the high ratio of assembly of a formal feature to a lexical item (such as the DO *give*) and the subsequent inclusion of the lexical item in the numeration enables L2 target-like constructions.

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## Recommendation for Future Studies

It would be desirable for future SLA studies to recruit speakers of other languages such as Mandarin Chinese to serve as participants. The findings for the second hypothesis suggest no L1 transfer initially with regard to English DOs. If Chinese DOs or Chinese SVCs could be investigated in comparison with English DOs, the results would substantiate whether L1 transfer or some other strategy such as optionality or indecision plays a role at the early stage of L2 acquisition.

## Acknowledgements

We appreciate Thammasat University for funding the research. We are grateful to the English informants and the three groups of Thai students from two universities and one high school in Bangkok who participated in this study. In addition, the second author would also like to thank her late mother, Eamporn Singhapreecha, for her moral support and encouragement, particularly during the writing of the manuscript. Finally, we are thankful to David Young for his great care in checking the language presentation, the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions, and Supakorn Phoocharoensil for his kind assistance with our submission.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> According to Larson (1988), the entire VP *a book give to Mary* serves as a predicate of *John*. To derive the output, *give* raises to the upper V, dominated by IP where *John* occupies its specifier position. The raising of the lower V is motivated by Case that is assigned to NP *a book*.

<sup>2</sup> Particularly, Singhapreecha and Sybesma (2015) assert that there are a hierarchy of functional categories, i.e., CP, IP, and AspP above vP for Thai and a number of phrasal movements into the specifiers of these functional categories for licensing, due largely to the presence of aspectual particles in sentence final position.

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**Appendix****Acceptability Judgment Target Sentences****Prepositional Dative Constructions**

1. Michelle gave a toy to her son.
2. Sam gave a T-shirt to his brother.
3. Amy told a joke to her mother.
4. Michael told a secret to his wife.
5. Helen handed a magazine to her daughter.
6. George handed his credit card to the cashier.
7. Peter sent the orchids to his girlfriend.
8. Edward sent a check to his wife.

**Double Object Constructions**

1. Anna gave her brother a ruler.
2. Daniel gave his mother a present.
3. Philip told his staff good news.
4. Julia told her friend the answer.
5. Jane handed her friend a thumb drive.
6. Ellen handed her brother a screwdriver.
7. Lisa sent her teacher a document.
8. Carol sent her husband a message.

**(Ungrammatical) English Counterparts of Thai Double Object Constructions**

1. \*William gave some flowers his girlfriend.
2. \*Bobby told his phone number the operator.
3. \*Nancy handed a ticket the staff.
4. \*Vanessa sent a long memo her staff.

**(Ungrammatical) English Counterparts of Thai Serial Verb Constructions**

1. \*Sharon gave a lipstick give her sister.
2. \*Vickie told her address give the salesman.
3. \*Frank handed his passport give the receptionist.
4. \*Tom sent a poster give his customer.