Specificity and animacy in the acquisition of Differential Object Marking in L2 Persian

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Background: DOM in Persian and Romanian

- referential stability is the trigger of DOM in both Persian and Romanian
- specificity scale: the common denominator is referential stability
  - referential stability scale (Parnass & van Heesewijk 2002)
  - proper names, pronouns > definite DPs > partitives > indefinite DPs
  - referentially stable (RS) DP versus referentially non-stable (RNS) DP
- the semantic feature which distinguishes DOM in Persian from DOM in Romanian ➔ animacy scale (Assen 2003)
- strength of specificity interferes with animacy

Research questions

- is there L1 transfer of the animacy constraint at any stage in the learning of DOM in L2 Persian?
- do L2 learners have (direct) access to universal prominence scales that underlie DOM?
- how does specificity harmonize with animacy in the L2 learning process?

Sentence-completion task (SCT)

- Participants
- Results SCT: DOM and animacy

Grammaticality-judgment task (GJT)

- Participants
- Results GJT: DOM and animacy

Results GJT: DOM and animacy

- no difference between acceptance/use rate of râ with [-animate] DP vs. RNS DPs (GJT: t(10)=3.762; SCT: t(10)=3.762)
- no difference between responses to sentences with definite DPs and PN & pron between Beginners and Intermediates
- higher acceptance rate of râ with partitives (M=4.5; SD=2.17) vs. indefinites (M=3.7; SD=2.138)
- PN & pron, def DP > partitive > indef DP

Discussion and conclusions

L1 transfer of the animacy constraint?

- no difference between acceptance/use rate of râ with [-animate] DP vs. indefinite DPs overall (GJT: t(10)=3.762; SCT: t(10)=3.762)

L2 access to universal prominence scales?

Specificity and animacy in L2

- no difference between acceptance/use rate of râ with partitives vs. indefinite DPs overall BUT in the SCT the difference reaches significance when the DP is [+animate] (partitives M=2.5, SD=1.095, indefinites M=1.5, SD=1.433) (t(10)=2.236, p<0.05)
- low specificity interferes with [+animate]

- DOM is preferentially accepted/used with RS DPs overall (GJT: t(10)=2.256, p=0.05; SCT: t(10)=2.893, p=0.01)


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