

*The Acquisition of English double object and prepositional datives in  
Cantonese-English bilingual children*

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**Abstract**

Analysis on 5 Cantonese-English bilingual children's longitudinal data from the Hong Kong Bilingual Child Language Corpus (Yip and Matthews, in press) reveals that bilingual subjects find English prepositional datives difficult to acquire. Using age of first clear use (non-imitative) as a measure, I find that four of five children acquire double object datives < directional *to* < prepositional datives, while one child Timmy acquires directional *to* < double object datives < prepositional datives. Comparison of the mean age of acquisition shows that bilingual children have wider temporal gaps between the acquisition of double object datives and prepositional datives, and between directional *to* and prepositional datives. These wider temporal gaps, combined with the fact that mean ages of acquisition of double object datives and directional *to* in bilingual children are similar to the respective mean ages in monolingual children, demonstrate that bilingual children are further delayed in their acquisition of prepositional datives.

Though as a group bilingual children are late in acquiring prepositional datives, there is one child Timmy who progresses fast from double object datives to prepositional datives. There is a temporal gap of only 2 months between Timmy's first double object dative and prepositional dative, while such a gap in monolingual children is 3.3 months in average. Timmy also produces directional *to* before his first double object datives, and acquires triadic directional *to* (1) at a remarkably early age of 2;04;14, while other bilingual children either fail to produce such triadic *to* or do so (2) at the age of 3;03;03. Findings in this study support the hypothesis that ambiguity in dative and directional *to* influences children's development in prepositional datives (Viau 2006).

**Examples:**

- (1) I take him to the hospital. (Timmy 2;04;14)
- (2) daddy can't do take her to the park # to the shop aa3. (Charlotte 3;03;03)

**Reference:**

Viau, Joshua. 2006. Give = CAUSE + HAVE/GO: Evidence for Early Semantic Decomposition of Dative Verbs in English Child Corpora. *Proceedings of the 30th annual Boston University Conference on Language Development*. eds. David Bamman, Tatiana

Language Acquisition in Chinese Context (LACC)  
The University of Hong Kong  
December 15-16, 2006

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Yip, Virginia and Stephen Matthews. In press. *The Bilingual Child: Early Development and Language Contact*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.