

*The Acquisition of Topics and Modals in L2 Cantonese:  
Testing the Full Transfer/ Full Access Hypothesis*

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**Abstract**

This study investigated Schwartz and Sprouse's (1994; 1996) Full Transfer/Full Access Hypothesis (FT/FA), a theory about interlanguage that proposes full L1 transfer and full UG access. FT/FA argues that 'all the principles and parameter values as instantiated in the L1 grammar immediately carry over as the initial state of a new grammatical system on first exposure to input from the target language' (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996: 41). FT/FA also argues that full access to UG restructures the interlanguage in later stages, causing parameters to change from the settings of the L1 to the settings of the L2. An investigation of FT/FA must look for two things: 1) evidence of the existence or non-existence of an initial state of complete L1 transfer; 2) evidence regarding the success or failure of parameter resetting.

The informants for this study were English-speaking learners of Cantonese (ELCs). The study looked for evidence of L1 transfer and UG parameter resetting by examining the acquisition of topic structures with null subjects and pre- and post-verbal modals. If FT/FA is correct, then null subjects should not be allowed in the beginning stages of English-Cantonese interlanguage, but they should be acquired later on. Also, if FT/FA is correct, L1 transfer of a word-order parameter should cause an NP-MOD-V structure like 'lei5 ho2ji5 heoi3' (you can go) to be easily acquired by beginner ELCs, while an NP-V-MOD structure like 'lei5 heoi3 dak1' (you go can) should not be successfully acquired until later on. Simultaneously, L1 transfer should cause ELCs to incorrectly accept the ungrammatical word order '\*lei5 dak1 heoi3' in the early stages of their interlanguage. In later stages, however, full access to UG should cause ELCs to reject the ungrammatical '\*lei5 dak1 heoi3' in favor of the grammatical 'lei5 heoi3 dak1'.

The findings supported the key tenets of FT/FA.