

Missing Surface Inflection in Adult and Child L2 Acquisition

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1. Introduction

Current research in second language (L2) acquisition has focused particularly on the failure of L2 learners to produce verbal inflectional morphology associated with functional categories. The question is whether the frequent omission of verbal inflection means that functional categories are impaired in L2 grammars. In some of these studies, Eubank (1993/94, 1996), Eubank and Grace (1998) and Vainikka and Young-Scholten (1994, 1996a, 1996b, 1998), in particular, the absence of target-like inflectional suffixes has been taken as the primary evidence for concluding that L2 learners do not project associated functional features or categories. For Meisel (1997), L2 learners make no finite-nonfinite distinctions in L2 acquisition and L2 grammars suffer from a global impairment in the domain of abstract features. On similar grounds, Beck (1998), and Eubank *et al.* (1997) argue for a local impairment according to which functional categories are available in L2 grammars, but their feature strength is impaired.

Such claims for impaired L2 grammars contrast with proposals that interlanguage grammars are not defective. In recent L2 studies a number of L2 researchers postulate the Missing Surface Inflection hypothesis, according to which the lack of (or the variable use of) morphological forms in interlanguage grammars reflects a problem with the realization of surface morphology, rather than an impairment in the domain of functional projections or feature strength (Haznedar & Schwartz, 1997; Haznedar, 2001; Lardiere, 1998a,b, 2000; Prévost & White, 2000a,b). In this paper I contribute to the debate by analyzing both child L2 data (English) and adult L2 data (Turkish), arguing against the position that L2 learners' variable use of inflection indicates lack of or impairment in associated syntactic representations.

2. Theories on the variable use of inflection in second language (L2) acquisition

Under Vainikka and Young-Scholten's (V&Y-S) Minimal Trees (or Weak Continuity) hypothesis, missing morphological forms suggest missing functional projections (V&Y-S 1994, 1996a,b, 1998). In a series of analyses of German L2 data from adult speakers of Korean, Turkish and Romance languages, V&Y-S have taken morphological deficiency as evidence for the lack of functional categories in the early stages of L2 acquisition. Under this view, criteria for the acquisition of functional categories require (i) the production of modals, auxiliaries, subject-verb agreement, tense marking, (ii) the productive use of yes/no questions with a fronted auxiliary/modal verb and wh-questions with a fronted wh-phrase, (iii) the use of embedded clauses with overt complementizers. Hence, the main assumption is that overt production of lexical elements or inflections are directly associated with functional categories.

In regard to the optional use of morphological forms, the Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis, however, holds that the variable use of inflection does not indicate an impairment in the representation of the associated functional projections (Haznedar & Schwartz 1997; Lardiere 1998a,b, 2000; Prévost & White 2000a,b; Haznedar 2001, 2003).

In her pioneering work, Lardiere (1998a,b, 2000) examines the end-state of L2 acquisition of a Chinese-speaking adult learner of English and shows that in spite of the low level of overt morphology, the data reveal a variety of syntactic phenomena which suggest that the learner has tense

and agreement at an abstract level. Following the Separation hypothesis, according to which the features associated with an affix are distinct from the phonological realization of that affix (e.g. Beard, 1987, 1988, 1993; Halle & Marantz, 1993), Lardiere argues that the learner's problems lie in the domain of morphological mapping rather than any deficit in functional projections and features.

Haznedar and Schwartz (1997) and Haznedar (2001) reported similar findings in child L2 data, from a Turkish-speaking child, Erdem. Despite the fact that Erdem produced many non-finite forms in his speech, he stopped omitting subjects long before the use of verbal inflection in obligatory contexts, suggesting that there is not a relationship between the use of inflectional morphology and overt subjects. Similarly, Haznedar (2001) presents robust evidence for the use of only nominative pronouns, suggesting that the Case checking mechanism is at work. The uninflected forms produced by Erdem are argued to be finite forms with Missing Inflections.

Prévost and White (2000b) also argue for a mapping problem between abstract features and surface morphological forms. They attempt to formulate this mapping problem in terms of Distributed Morphology (Halle and Marantz, 1993), according to which an inflected form is assumed to be associated with grammatical features such as tense, person, number and gender. In lexical insertion, the features of a lexical item should be consistent with the features of the terminal node in the syntax. The crucial point is that while the features of a syntactic node are fully specified, those of a lexical item might not be specified. Thus, it is possible for a lexical item to be inserted into the hosting node, even though some of its features may be missing or partially specified. For Prévost and White (2000), L2 learners acquire the relevant grammatical features of the terminal node in the syntax via L1, UG or L2 input, but they might not have fully acquired feature specifications of the associated lexical items. They propose that while in the adult grammar non-finite forms are specified as [-finite] and finite forms are [+finite], in the interlanguage grammar non-finite forms can be inserted into a node bearing the [+finite] feature, due to the existence of mismatching features in the L2 grammar. Finite forms, on the other hand, are fully specified as [+finite] and therefore appear in finite contexts. Under this analysis then, there is no syntactic deficit in interlanguage grammars.

3. Morphosyntactic background

Under standard analyses, Turkish is classified as a head-final language with an unmarked SOV word order both in main clauses and embedded clauses. Turkish morphology is agglutinative and suffixing. As an inflectionally rich language, Turkish verbs are inflected for person, number and tense. The tenses are: definite past (-DI), reported past (-mIs); aorist (-Ar); future (-AcAK); present progressive - (Iyor). Two tense markers can cooccur in immediate succession to form complex tenses. The right-most inflectional suffix on the verb is person/number agreement, which identifies null subjects in Turkish. Verbal agreement markers are: 1sg (-Im); 2sg (-sIn); 3sg \emptyset ; 1pl (-Iz); 2pl (-sInIz); 3pl (-IAr). Under Kural's (1992) analysis, AgrP is the highest functional projection and the subject in Turkish moves to Spec-AgrP, where its nominative Case is checked under Spec-head agreement. In addition to verbal agreement Turkish also has nominal agreement 1sg -(I)m; 2sg -(I)n; 3sg -(s)I(n); 1pl -(I)mIz; 2pl (I)nIz; 3pl (-IArI(n)). The verbal agreement paradigm is used with the predicates of main clauses and of direct complements. The nominal paradigm is used on the head nouns of possessive noun phrases as well as on the nominalized verbs of clausal complements. Turkish has six Cases: Nominative, Accusative -(y)I, Dative -(y)A, Locative -DA, Ablative -Dan and Genitive -(n)I(n). Unlike all other Cases, nominative Case is not overtly marked in Turkish (Kornfilt 1990).

4. The data

The data examined in this study were obtained from two different sources: (i) a Turkish-speaking child L2 learner of English, which is the subject of previous studies (e.g. Haznedar 2001, Haznedar 2003), and (ii) an English-speaking adult L2 learner of Turkish. Each study will be discussed separately.

4.1. Study I: The child L2 study (L1-Turkish, L2-English)

The subject of the first study, Erdem, is a Turkish-speaking boy who started learning English at age 4.0. He was 4.3 at the beginning of data collection. The longitudinal data, consisting of 46 recordings, cover a period of 18 months.

4.1.1. Overt subjects and nominative subject pronouns

The number of obligatory contexts for subjects in the first several recordings is rather low. Starting in Sample 8 the number of overt subjects increases rapidly. In Sample 9, of the 50 contexts, 47 (94%) have overt subjects. At a very early point Erdem acquired the knowledge that English is not a pro-drop language. In regard to the distribution of subject pronouns, it should be noted that unlike L1 acquisition of English (e.g. Pensalfini 1995; Rispoli 1994; Vainikka 1993/94), almost all of the pronominal subjects in Erdem's speech are nominative. There are only 3 examples in the whole corpus in which the pronominal subject is incorrectly realised in the accusative Case (Haznedar 1997, Haznedar & Schwartz 1997, Haznedar 2001). Of the 6596 nominative pronouns in nominative contexts, Erdem's error rate is extremely small 3/5163 (0.06%).

4.1.2. Subject-verb agreement

As discussed in Haznedar (2001) in detail, the development of the 3sg *-s* is gradual. While the first obligatory context for 3sg *-s* occurs in Sample 9 (5 June 1994), no verbs are inflected with 3sg *-s* until Sample 15 (16 Sep 1994). Even after Sample 15, around 90% of the verbs are uninflected. Table 1 presents the gradual development of the 3sg *-s* at different time periods.

Samples	Recording date	Inflected		Uninflected	
S 1-8	9 Mar 94-20 May 94	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
S 9-14	5 June 94-30 Aug 94	0	0.00%	4/4	100.00%
S 15-28	16 Sep 94-20 Jan 95	14/119	11.76%	105/119	88.24%
S 29-35	26 Jan 95-16 Mar 95	108/326	33.13%	218/326	66.87%
S 36-40	24 Mar 95-19 May 95	130/211	61.61%	81/211	38.39%
S 41-46	26 May 95-24 Aug 95	185/258	71.71%	73/258	28.29%

4.1.3. Tense marking (Irregular past and regular past tense)

Similar to the development of 3sg *-s*, the use of past forms is also gradual. As shown in Table 2, in Samples 10-21, there are 13 (13/109, 11.93%) utterances that contain irregular past, as opposed to 96 (88.07%) utterances where the irregular past is not provided. Similarly, in Samples 22-27, only 28.24% (24/85) of the time are past irregular forms found in the data.

Samples	Recording date	Inflected		Uninflected	
S 1-9	9 Mar 94-5 June 94	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
S 10-21	13 June 94-15 Nov 94	13/109	11.93%	96/109	88.07%
S 22-27	22 Nov 94-13 Jan 95	24/85	28.24%	61/85	71.76%
S 28-40	20 Jan 95-19 May 95	153/367	41.69%	214/367	58.31%
S 41-46	26 May 95-24 Aug 95	179/348	51.44%	169/348	48.56%

Regular past tense morphology on verbs is also not provided for a long period of time, even more protracted than irregular past and *-s*. Up to Sample 37 (13 Apr 1995), only 12 (9.92%) regular past forms are produced out of 121 obligatory contexts. In sum, 3sg *-s* and past tense forms do not appear in Erdem's early L2 data, but their development follows a gradual pattern.

4.1.4. *Yes/no questions*

The number of yes/no questions in the earliest samples is low. It is only after Sample 15 that the number of questions increases. In early data we find the use of yes/no questions with copula *be* and auxiliary *be*. Large numbers of yes/no questions with *do* and modal verbs are found in the corpus. It is important to note that I-to-C movement with modal verbs, auxiliary and copula *be*, and *do* are acquired prior to overt suppliance of agreement and tense morphology in obligatory contexts (Haznedar 2003).

4.2. *Discussion*

Erdem's data on the use of 3sg *-s* and past tense forms show that the development of inflectional morphology is rather gradual. The crucial question, however, is whether one can conclude that AgrSP/TP is missing simply because agreement and tense marking is virtually missing in early L2 data. The answer to this question appears to be 'no', as evidence for the presence of the functional category in Erdem's grammar comes from other sources such as the use of copula *be*, auxiliary *be*, the movement of syntactic elements to AgrSP/TP or to the Specifier of AgrSP/TP. As discussed in Haznedar (2001), the analysis of sentences with Copula *be* shows that starting in Sample 8 the percentage of utterances with the copula *be* is virtually always over 90%. Similarly, despite occurrences of null subjects in the very first recordings, after Sample 8 the rate of overt subjects is high, usually over 85-90%. On the assumption that features under I are checked through subject raising, the consistent use of overt subjects shows that Erdem has knowledge of AgrSP. One other important finding in the study is concerned with the lack of non-nominative subjects. Under V&Y-S's account, L2 grammars lack IP in early stages, and therefore are not able to check nominative Case features (Vainikka 1993/94); hence, non-nominative subjects are expected to occur. This prediction, however, is not supported, since non-nominative Case errors are close to zero in Erdem's interlanguage. On the assumption that the specifier position of AgrSP (i.e. Spec of AgrSP) is responsible for Case checking, the presence of nominative pronouns in Erdem's grammar requires AgrSP.

In regard to CP-related elements, we find the productive use of questions and complementizers mainly after Sample 15. A potential prediction of the Minimal Trees hypothesis is that root subject wh-questions should be acquired earlier than non-subject wh-questions, since movement is not possible due to lack of CP. This prediction is not born out either: Of the 48 wh-questions until Sample 20, none of them are subject wh-questions (25/322 until Sample 46). It should also be noted that complement clauses with wh-constituents and *because* and *if* were widely produced at a time when the learner was not producing verbal inflectional morphology. Furthermore, utterances which require a CP occur with an uninflected form of the verb, as in *Do you know what this say?* (S 16), and *I think she want to know how we are eating* (S 37) (Haznedar 2003).

In sum, at stages where certain elements such as copula *be*, auxiliary *be* and complementizers are present and productively used in syntactic operations, others like 3sg *-s*, past tense forms and modals do not appear in Erdem's English. Therefore, the delay in the production of 3sg *-s* and tense morphology cannot be because Erdem does not project the associated functional categories such as IP/AgrSP/TP or CP.

5. Study II. The adult L2 study (L1-English, L2-Turkish)

Subject: The data examined in this adult L2 study were obtained from an American student, John, during his stay at Boğaziçi University as an exchange student. Spontaneous production data consist of 6 recordings, covering a period of 5 months. Each recording, ranging from 60 to 90 minutes in length, was conducted in Turkish.

5.1. Tense marking

Four types of tense morphology (Past (-*dl*), present continuous (-*Iyor*), present (*Ir*) and future (-*AcAk*)) are found in the adult L2 data.

- (1) Ben çocukken kuzey-batı otur-du-m (S1)
 I child north-west-**missing locative** live-past-1sg
 'When I was a child I lived in the north-west'
- (2) Çok sebze sev-mi-yor-um. (S1)
 Much vegetable like-neg-pres. prog. 1sg
 'I don't like vegetables much'
- (3) Benim anem çok sağlıklı yemek yapar.
 'My mother very healthy food cook-present-Ø
 'My mother cooks healthy food'
- (4) Mahallede çocuklar başka ev gid-ecek-ler (S1)
 street-loc children other house-**missing dative** go-future-3pl
 'The children will visit other houses on the street'

Past and present utterances are the most frequently produced forms in the data. The percentage of the accurate use of tense marking is rather high. In Sample 1, of the 259 obligatory contexts, in 257 (99/23%) of them tense morphology is used correctly. As can be seen in Table 3, we find few instances of faulty tense marking.

	Past	Present progressive	Present	Future	Total
S 1	88/90 (97.8%)	108/108 (100%)	58/58 (100%)	3/3 (100%)	259
S 2	91/100 (91.0%)	3/3 (100%)	164/165 (99.4%)	15/15 (100%)	283
S 3	210/238 (88.2%)	30/30 (100%)	2/2 (100%)	4/4 (100%)	274
S 4	99/110 (90.0%)	46/46 (100%)	68/68 (100%)	11/11 (100%)	235
S 5	105/109 (96.3%)	68/68 (100%)	91/91 (100%)	19/19 (100%)	287
S 6	110/114 (96.5%)	51/51 (100%)	120/120 (100%)	15/16 (93.8%)	301
Total	761	306	504	68	1639

5.2. Subject-verb agreement

Except for the third person singular, no uninflected stem is permitted in Turkish and verbs in Turkish are inflected for person. The first person singular agreement morpheme (-*Im*) is the most frequently used form in the data. Of the 1704 utterances in the adult L2 data, 728 (42/72%) have the 1sg agreement morphology. Table 4 presents the total number of all subject-verb agreement contexts.

	1st person sg	2nd person sg	1st person pl	2nd person pl	3rd person pl	Total
S 1	100	0	10	2	10	122
S 2	124	4	13	3	12	156
S 3	127	6	76	0	11	220
S 4	110	2	27	4	12	155
S 5	133	5	44	4	13	199
S 6	134	6	15	87	6	852
Total	728	23	185	100	64	1704

Despite differing rates of occurrence, the learner's L2 grammar provides evidence for the use of all subject-verb agreement morphemes. Overall, native-like mastery of agreement morphology is found in the data. In sum, agreement and tense related elements such as subject verb agreement and finite sentences are present and productively used. These findings suggest that AgrSP and TP are projected.

5.3. Subjects

On the assumption that subjects, as well as objects, should raise and check their Case features through Spec-head agreement with an inflectional head, the status of subjects in John's Turkish is also relevant. Subjects are divided into two groups in the study: overt subjects and null subjects. Overt subjects refer to lexical subjects and pronominal subjects (*ben (I)*, *sen (you)*, *o (he/she/it)*, *biz (we)*, *siz (you)*, *onlar (they)*).

(5) Malesef ben çok sabır-sız-ım (S1)
 unfortunately I very patient-neg-1sg
 'Unfortunately I am very impatient'

(6) pro çok film kiralyoruz (S1)
 many video rent-present prog.-1pl
 'We rent many videos'

As shown in Table 5, the learner produces both overt and null subjects, with null subjects occurring around 60% of the time.

Samples	Null subjects	Overt subjects	Total	% null	% overt
S 1	93	114	207	45	55
S 2	137	20	157	87	13
S 3	188	113	301	62	38
S 4	133	72	205	65	35
S 5	185	71	256	72	28
S 6	143	99	242	59	41
Total	879	489	1368	64	36

The crucial finding is that subjects consistently appear in Nominative form in the data. Table 6 presents the distribution of pronominal subjects in the study. Although *I* (*ben*) and *we* (*biz*) are the most frequently produced nominative pronouns in the corpus, all other forms are also attested in the data.

	Ben (I)	Sen (you)	O (he/she/it)	Biz (we)	Siz (you)	Onlar (they)	Total
S 1	20	1	0	9	0	3	33
S 2	3	0	0	3	0	0	6
S 3	28	4	0	16	0	5	53
S 4	26	0	2	6	1	1	36
S 5	18	0	0	7	0	0	25
S 6	25	5	1	9	1	0	41
Total	120	10	3	50	2	9	194

5.4. Case marking

With respect to the realization of the Case system in L2 Turkish, we examine the use of accusative, dative, genitive, locative and ablative Cases. Similar to previous work, the variable use of Case morphology appears both in the form of omission and substitution (e.g. Prévost and White 2000a,b; Gürel 2000).

- (7) Benim ailem-**X** çok özlü-yor-um.
 my family-**missing accusative** very miss-present-1ps
 'I miss my family very much'
- (8) Context: Talking about Halloween
 Çocuklar bizim kapı-**X** gelecekler
 Children our door-**missing dative** come-future-3pl
 'The children will come to us'
- (9) benim arkadaşım Fatih ben-i öğretti.
 my friend Fatih **I-faulty case (acc for dat)** teach-past-1ps
 'My friend Fatih taught me'
- (10) Sonra sen Türkiye-de gel-ecek-sin
 Later you Turkey-**faulty inflection (loc for dat)** come-future-2sg
 'You will come to Turkey'

Except for genitive Case marking, the error rate for each Case type is rather high: (91.56%) for accusative, (88.32%) for dative, (96.30%) for ablative, (58.33%) for locative.

Table 7 presents the total number of obligatory contexts for accusative, dative, genitive, locative and ablative Case morphemes versus the learner's suppliance rate of these morphemes. As shown in Table 7, omission errors far exceed substitution errors. In accusative and dative contexts, for example, although the proportion of omission errors is over 85%, only 4-6 percent of the time do we find substitution errors.

	Obligatory context	Suppliance (%)	Substitution (%)	Missing inflection (%)	Total errors
Accusative	438	37 (8.5%)	26 (5.9%)	375 (85.6%)	401 (91.6%)
Dative	197	23 (11.7%)	7 (3.6%)	167 (84.8%)	174 (88.3%)
Genitive	307	217 (70.2%)	0	90 (29.8%)	90 (29.8%)
Locative	264	110 (41.7%)	40 (14.0%)	114 (43.2%)	154 (58.3%)
Ablative	26	1 (3.9%)	0	25 (96.2%)	25 (96.2%)

5.4.1. Nominative Case

As discussed in Section 5.3, subjects consistently appear in nominative form. Not a single example of a non-nominative subject is found.

5.4.2. Accusative Case $-(y)I$

The suppliance of accusative Case morphology is rather low. In Sample 2, of the 65 obligatory contexts, only 5 (7.7%) instances of accusative Case marking are found. While Sample 5 has 110 cases where accusative Case marking is obligatory, in 104 (94.5%) cases the accusative marker is missing.

- (11) pro her çocuk-**X** bil-mi-yor-um
 every child-**missing accusative** know-neg-present progressive-1sg
 'I don't know every child'

5.4.3. Dative Case $-(y)A$

Similar to the distribution of accusative Case marking, we find low suppliance of dative Case morphology. There are 15 obligatory contexts in Sample 1; in all cases the dative Case morpheme is missing. In Sample 2, of the 24 contexts, only 1 (4.2%) sentence has dative Case marking.

- (12) Çocuklar bizim kapı-**X** gel-ecek-ler
 Children our door-**missing dative** come-future-3pl
 'The children will come to our door'

5.4.4. Locative Case $-DA$,

The use of locative Case marking is the second-most relatively frequent Case morpheme in the learner's L2 grammar.

- (13) Bugün Amerika-da şükran gün-ü
 Today America-Locative thanksgiving day-accusative
 'It's Thanksgiving day in America today'

5.4.5. Ablative Case $-Dan$

The suppliance rate is the lowest for ablative Case. There are 26 obligatory contexts, and in only one of them (Sample 2) is the ablative morpheme ($-DAn$) produced.

- (14) Bu belge siz-i hediye ben-den
 This document you-faulty inflection present I-ablative
 'This document is a present for you from me'

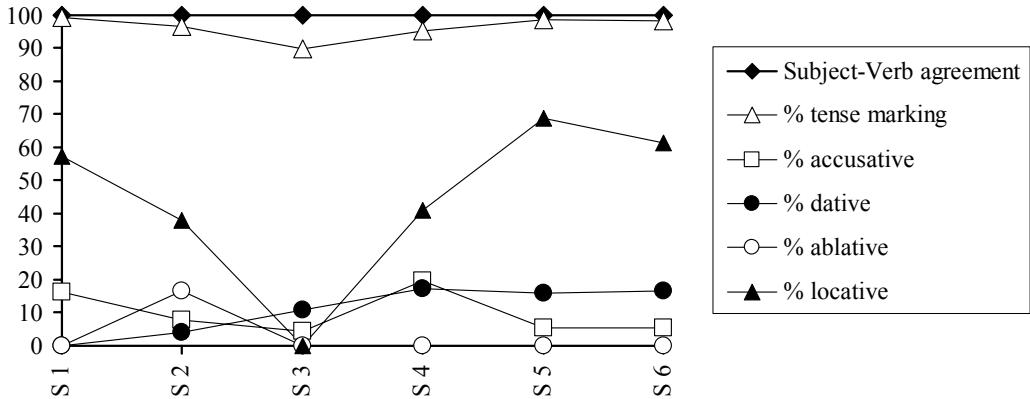
In the remaining 25 cases (96.15%), the ablative morpheme is not provided.

5.4.6. Genitive Case $-(n)I(n)$

Genitive marking is the most accurately and productively used form. In comparison to the low suppliance of all other Case types, genitive marking is supplied 70% (217/307) of the time.

Figure 1 presents the suppliance rate for subject-verb agreement and tense marking versus the suppliance rate of Case marking (accusative, dative, locative, ablative).

Figure 1. Percentage of agreement + tense marking vs. case marking (acc, dat, loc, abl)



5.5. Discussion

John's data on the use of subject-verb agreement show that at a time when agreement morphology is consistently accurate and productively used, Case morphology is either not present or used incorrectly. Furthermore, at a time when the learner provides evidence for native-like mastery of tense morphology, the suppliance rate of Case marking is rather low. While the suppliance rate for past tense in Sample 1 is 98% (88/90), only 10 out of 62 (16%) utterances have accusative Case marking. Similarly, of the 238 occurrences of past forms in Sample 3—the accuracy rate being 95% (227/238)—the percentage of accusative Case marking is only 3.5%.

It is clear that despite the productive use of subject-verb agreement and tense morphology, the learner appears to have difficulty with overt realizations of Case morphology in Turkish. We have seen that while he overwhelmingly produces non-Case-marked sentences, all subjects consistently appear in nominative form in the data. This result is consistent with Gürel (2000). The presence of native-like agreement morphology and nominative subjects suggests that this adult L2 learner of Turkish has nominative Case checking as an abstract syntactic operation.

These findings show the variable use of Case inflection either in the form of omission or incorrect use, despite the learner's knowledge of the presence of syntactic projections in the L2 grammar.

6. Conclusion

Results from both studies (child L2 acquisition of English and adult L2 acquisition of Turkish) suggest that L2 learners face difficulties with the overt realization of surface morphology. What we argue is that the lack of functional elements should not be taken as evidence for the absence of the associated functional categories.

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