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14b L2 Acquisition of Japanese Case Drop Phenomenon*

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I. Introduction

In this study, we will provide evidence that second language (L2) learners observe constraints on Japanese Case drop phenomenon. If this phenomenon is not derived from L2 input, instructions, first language (L1) grammar, our findings indicate that L2 knowledge of the Japanese Case drop phenomenon is constrained by the properties of Universal Grammar (UG).

This paper is organized as follows. First, we briefly describe and analyze the Japanese Case drop phenomenon. Next, we consider the predictions in L2 acquisition, and then provide an outline of our experiment. Finally, we provide discussion.

II. Analysis of Japanese Case Drop

In colloquial Japanese, the nominative Case marker *-ga* sometimes can be dropped in an intransitive sentence (Kageyama 1993).[1]

a.	Dono	tokei-∅	kosyo-simas-ita	ka?	(1)
	Which	clock-NOM	break-do-PAST	Q	

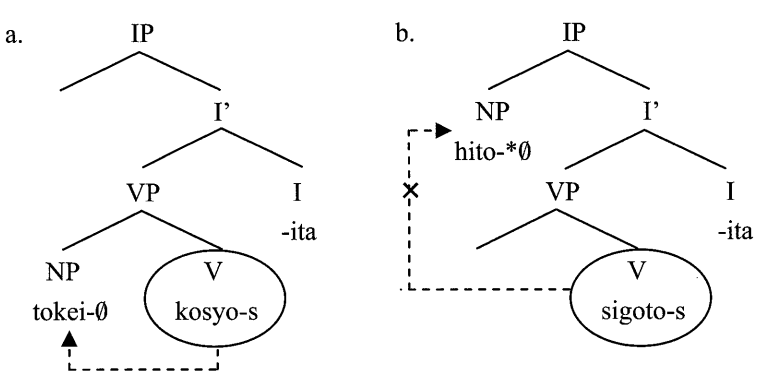
'Which clock broke?'

b.	*Dono	hito-∅	sigoto-simas-ita	ka?
	Which	person-NOM	work-do-PAST	Q

'Which person worked?'

The contrast between (1a) and (1b) is largely accounted for by the properties of UG including the Unaccusativity Hypothesis (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995) and the Empty Category Principle (Fukuda 1993). The Unaccusativity Hypothesis states that due to the argument structure that V has, the subjects in (1a) and (1b) are in different structural positions—the former is within the VP and the latter is outside of the VP. The Empty Category Principle states that a nonpronominal empty category must be properly governed. Thus, the situations of (1a) and (1b) are simply illustrated in (2a) and (2b).

(2)



In (2a), NP *tokei* is within the VP and is properly governed by V *kosyo-s*, therefore the Case drop is allowed. While in (2b), *hito* is outside the VP, and thus, it is not properly governed by V *sigoto-s*. Therefore, the Case drop is not allowed.

III. Case Drop in L2 Acquisition

The contrast between (1a) and (1b) are not explained by the L2 input or instructions. In addition, the contrast in (1) is not induced by directly applying the knowledge of L1, if the L1 grammar of an L2 learner has no visible nominative Case marker (For example, in English, Case is only visible in the

pronominal system (*he* vs. *him*, etc.) and Chinese has no visible Case). Therefore, we can expect that if L2 learners have L1 with no visible nominative Case marker would observe the contrast in (1), L2 knowledge of Japanese Case drop is constrained by the properties of UG such as the Unaccusativity Hypothesis, and the Empty Category Principle.

IV. Experiment

1. Participants

To investigate whether English or Chinese learners of the Japanese observe the Japanese Case drop phenomenon, we conducted an experiment with one adult native speaker of English and eight adult native speakers of Chinese, ranging in age from 19 to 25 years. They were students at Keio University or Japanese Language School affiliated with Tokyo International University. In addition, 10 native speakers of Japanese, who were undergraduate students at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, participated in the experiment as controls.

2. Method

Test sentences included two types, each of which is illustrated in (3a) and (3b). The sentences in both (3a) and (3b) were intransitive sentences with *-ga* dropped and were the same word order however, only the sentences in (3b) were grammatically incorrect. Each sentence type was represented by five tokens so that a total of 10 test sentences were included.

a.	Dono	tokei-ϕ	kosyo-simas-ita	ka?	(3)(= (1))
	Which	clock-NOM	break-do-PAST	Q	
	'Which clock broke?'				
b.	*Dono	hito-ϕ	sigoto-simas-ita	ka?	
	Which	person-NOM	work-do-PAST	Q	
	'Which person worked?'				

The participants had to read the written test sentences arranged at random and find five unacceptable sentences.

3. Results

The overall results are summarized in Table 1. In general, L2 learners were not sensitive to the Japanese Case drop phenomenon, but individual results indicated that three learners could answer all the test sentences correctly.

Table 1. Overall performance results among L2 learners and controls

	L2 learners	Controls
% of Correct Answers	66.7%	82.0%
# of subjects answering all the test sentences correctly	3/9	6/10[2]

V. Discussion

The results of our experiment show that while the Japanese Case drop phenonomenon in intransitive sentences is not explained by the L2 input or knowledge of L1, some learners can acquire it.

This study also suggested that L2 learners observe the properties of UG, such as the Unaccusativity Hypothesis and the Empty Category Principle.

Notes

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1 All examples in this paper are associated with *wh*-phrases such as *dono tokei* 'which clock', in order to ensure that the deleted Case marker is not interpreted as the topic marker *-wa*, since *-wa* can always be dropped (Kuno 1973).

2 Hirakawa (2003) also investigated L2 learners' knowledge of Japanese Case drop phenomenon and her results showed that native controls (and the L2 learners) didn't know the contrast between (1a) and (1b). She remarked that "The unexpected results of the controls are potentially due to the fact that the Case drop phenomenon is mainly observed in spoken Japanese, and not in written Japanese." (Hirakawa 2003, 221)

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