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## Bare Nouns in L2 Japanese

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### I. Introduction

This paper discusses whether a logical problem of language acquisition indeed exists in second language (L2) acquisition (cf. Bley-Vroman, 1990; Schwartz and Sprouse 2000). If it can be shown that L2ers exhibit unconscious knowledge of the target language which could not be derived solely from the L2 input, or from first language (L1), then this motivates claims for the existence of a logical problem in L2 acquisition. To investigate whether this problem exists in L2 acquisition, it is necessary to explore whether the target grammar cannot be derived from the general learning mechanism or the L2 input and be induced by directly applying L1 grammar.

To address this issue, I discuss the ellipsis construction including the bare noun in Japanese and I demonstrate that adult Mandarin L2 learners understand the ellipsis construction in Japanese without specific instruction and suggest that there is a logical problem of language acquisition in L2.

Section II describes and analyzes the properties of bare noun and ellipsis construction includes bare noun to clarify the constraints that learners must know when acquiring the differences between Japanese and Mandarin. Section III concerns hypotheses and predications for L2 acquisition of the ellipsis construction and report my experimental data from Mandarin learners of Japanese. Section IV makes a conclusion.

## II. Properties of Bare Noun in Japanese and in Chinese

First, I will introduce the properties of the Japanese bare noun. It can be indefinite or definite as in (1).

- a. Inu-ga      toori-wo      yokogiritai (indefinite/definite)      (1)  
 dog-NOM    road-ACC    want.to.across  
 ‘The dog/the dogs want/s to cross the road.’/‘A dog wants to cross the road.’
- b. Inu-wa      kyo      totemo    tyujitu    datta. (definite)  
*dog-TOP    today    very    obedient    COP*  
 ‘The dog/the dogs was/were very obedient today’

In contrast, bare nouns in Mandarin have only one interpretation. As shown in the following examples, Mandarin bare noun cannot be interpreted as indefinite in the preverbal position.

- a. Gou      yao      guo      malu.      (definite)      (2)  
*dog      want    cross    road*  
 ‘The dog/the dogs want/wants to cross the road.’  
*not:* ‘A dog wants to cross the road.’
- b. Gou      jintian    tebie      tinghua.    (definite)  
*dog      today    very    obedient*  
 ‘The dog/the dogs was/were very obedient today’  
 (Cheng and Sybesma 1999: 510)

When we use the ellipsis construction, which indicates availability of null subjects in finite clauses, this difference in the interpretation of bare noun between Japanese and Mandarin becomes clearer. Oku (1998) asserts that the position of the null subject in Japanese and Mandarin is empty in the overt syntax, and that the subject of an antecedent clause is copied into the empty subject position at LF component. In Japanese example (3), the burglar who broke into Mr. Sato’s house can be different from the one who

broke into Mr. Yamada's house. Thus, Japanese allows Situation 1 in (4) and Situation 2 in (5).<sup>1</sup>

- a. Dorobo-ga satosan-no ie-ni haitta. (3)  
 burglar-NOM Ms.Sato-GEN house-DAT broke.into  
 'Burglar broke into Mr. Sato's house.'

- b. *e* Yamadasan-no ie-ni-mo haitta.  
 Ms.Yamada-GEN house-DAT-also broke.into  
 'Burglar also broke into Mr. Yamada's house.'

Situation 1 (4)



Situation 2 (5)



In the Mandarin example (6) on the other hand, the burglar who broke into Mr. Yamada's house must be the same person who broke into Mr. Sato's house. Thus, Mandarin allows only situation 2 in (5).

- a. Xiǎotōur jǐnrú Zuoteng jiā (6)  
 burglar broke.into Mr. Sato's house  
 'The burglar broke into Mr. Sato's house.'

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this paper, I use the symbol 'e' to indicate a null element.

- b. *e ye*      *jínrú*      *Shantian*      *jiā*  
           *also*      *broke.into*      *Mr. Yamada's*      *house*  
           ‘He also broke into Mr. Yamada’s house.’

This difference is attributed from the properties of bare noun in each language.

Ellipsis constructions including the bare noun in both the L2 learner’s native language and Japanese have identical syntactic form and distribution but differ in available interpretation. That is, this difference is not simply investigated through surface word order or there is no salient morphology L1-L2 differences related to this construction. In the absence of supporting changes in the overt syntax, what kind of linguistic evidence available to the L2 learners?

Following these analyses, I consider the L2 acquisition of ellipsis construction in the next chapter.

### III. Experiment

#### 1. Hypotheses and predictions

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The difference between Japanese and Mandarin is not derived from the general learning mechanism through examining surface word-order, because each subject is elided. Constraints on these contrasts are not taught in classrooms and are not derived solely from the L2 input. In addition, this contrast is not induced by directly applying an individual’s knowledge of L1. Thus, if a logical problem of language acquisition exists in L2 acquisition, L2 learners know of the ellipsis in the target language.

#### 2. Participants

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Nineteen Mandarin L2 learners of Japanese were tested. They had never been taught explicitly the Mandarin/Japanese ellipsis construction. 10 native Japanese speakers were also involved as a control group.

#### 3. Procedure

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The picture judgment task was employed to originate data for test/control sentences in Japanese. Test sentence is shown in. After three practice trials,

five tokens of test sentences as in (3) were given, with fillers. Then, five tokens of control sentences including an overt pronoun in the subject position as in (7) were given with fillers. Participants were asked to indicate whether a situation shown by two pictures like (4) or (5) was correctly described by the sentence beneath it.

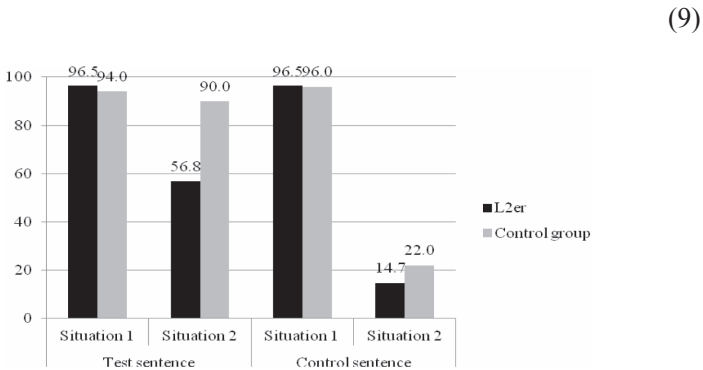
- a. Dorobo-ga      satosan-no      ie-ni      haitta.      (7)  
 burglar-NOM   Ms.Sato-GEN   house-DAT   broke.into  
 ‘Burglar broke into Mr. Sato’s house.’
- b. Kare-ha      Yamadasan-no      ie-ni-mo      haitta.  
 he-TOP      Ms.Yamada-GEN   house-DAT-also   broke.into  
 ‘Burglar also broke into Mr. Yamada’s house.’

The expected answers are shown in (8).

	Situation 1	Situation 2
Test sentence	OK	OK
Control sentence	OK	×

#### 4. Results

The results are summarized in (9) to (10). (9) shows the percentage of acceptance of test/control sentences in each target language. (10) shows the number of participants who correctly answered at least 80% of the questions (participants were awarded at least four of the five tokens)



	Situation 1		Situation 2	
	L2er	Control group	L2er	Control group
Test sentence	18/19	10/10	10/19	8/10
Control sentence	18/19	10/10	3/19	2/10

Mandarin-speaking learners of Japanese permitted Situation 2 both for the sentences with a null subject and the sentences with an overt pronominal subject. In contrast, learners allowed Situation 1 only when the sentence contains a null subject, and disallowed this situation when the sentence involved an overt pronominal subject. The correlation between age or level of learners and their accuracy is not founded.

#### IV. Conclusion

Mandarin L2 learners are sensitive to the internal properties of noun phrase, i.e., of definiteness in Japanese. Although preliminary, the study's findings indicate that L2 learners rely on the internal properties of noun phrases which could not be derived solely from the L2 input, or from L1, and that the logical problem of language acquisition exists in L2 Mandarin.

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