

# 主論文の要約

(Abstract of Dissertation)

論文題目 : The Early Grammatical Development in Young Japanese Learners of English as a Foreign Language: A Cross-Sectional Study Utilizing Processability Theory

氏名 : EGUCHI Akiko

論文内容の要約 :

This dissertation aims to clarify early syntactic development in young Japanese learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), based on speech production elicited through communicative and monologue tasks, using the Processability Theory (PT) (Pienemann, 1998; Pienemann, Di Biase & Kawaguchi, 2005; Pienemann & Keßler, 2011) as a theoretical framework. Particularly, the analysis focuses on verifying the recently proposed Prominence Hypothesis (Bettoni & Di Biase, 2015).

Chapter 1, as the introduction, stated the purpose and significance of the study and briefly explained the outline of this dissertation. Regarding the emergence, not the accuracy, of a grammatical structure as acquisition criteria, PT predicts that all second language (L2) learners, irrespective of their backgrounds, follow valid developmental schedules due to psycholinguistic constraints on real time language processing. However, for L2 English, this prediction has been based largely on the evidence in English as a second language (ESL) contexts or from learners whose first language (L1) is typologically similar to English. The Prominence Hypothesis, which emphasizes the discourse-pragmatic ability in L2 syntactic development, is also based on the longitudinal ESL data elicited from a Japanese L1 child. Regarding Japanese EFL learners, whose L1 is typologically distant from English, the PT prediction in syntax has been supported based on results from university students (Sakai, 2008), and the applicability of PT has been confirmed for junior high school students (Eguchi & Sugiura, 2015). However, the earlier stages of syntactic development have not been empirically clear.

In Japan, in response to rapid globalization, and in order to nurture sound communicative competence, the current fifth and sixth grade English lessons at public elementary schools called *Foreign Language Activities* will be reformed into a formal subject by the year 2020. Accordingly, the curriculum for English education at junior high schools would also need to be restructured to build a strong foundation for effective communication through grammatical instructions in communicative activities. Nonetheless, previous studies on the overall development of English speaking competence for Japanese junior high school students have been discussed within the framework of complexity, accuracy, and fluency (CAF), whereas the development of each grammatical structure has not received much attention. Further, to my knowledge, none of the previous studies has investigated the grammatical development of Japanese elementary students based on speech data in communicative discourse. For these theoretical and educational backgrounds, the findings in the present study would not only endorse PT with new evidence from the early stages of Japanese EFL learners but also contribute to understanding the early stages of English education in Japan.

In Chapter 2, the first section documented the learning environment of early EFL in Japan as one of the major issues in my research background. Officially, English education at public

elementary school has been in practice since 2011. However, the weekly lessons do not focus on language skill development *per se*; instead, they aim to foster a positive attitude toward communication, whereas English instruction in public junior high schools, with four lessons per week, aims to develop students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills for communicative competence. However, both learner groups have little or no experience in applying their instructed English language skills in their daily lives.

The second section in Chapter 2 described the similarities and differences of typological characteristics between Japanese and English. One of the apparent differences of the two languages is the word order. English is a head-initial language, where the canonical word order subject-verb-object (SVO) is rigid. In contrast, the Japanese counterpart is a head-final language, where the canonical order subject-object-verb (SOV) is relatively flexible to the degree that the verb can be placed at the sentence-final position. Subsequently, the third and fourth section respectively reviewed the early English L2 studies on the accuracy order of morphemes and the developmental sequences of syntax.

Chapter 3 elaborated on the PT, which explains the universality of the L2 developmental hierarchy by drawing on two theoretical resources: Levelt's (1989) Speech Production Model for language processing and Bresnan's (2001) Lexical Functional Grammar for language formulation. In addition, I extended the current issue on the developmental relationship between syntax and morphology. Previous discussions of PT had assumed that L2 syntax and morphology develop in the same processing procedure. However, recent empirical studies have revealed that syntax and morphology do not necessarily develop in tandem (e.g., Dyson, 2009). Contrary to a near-universal hierarchy of syntax, morphological development is unstable and tends to lag behind syntactic development (e.g., Eguchi & Sugiura, 2015). Lastly, I introduced the Prominence Hypothesis, which predicts three developmental stages of topicalization in declarative sentences: (1) SVO, (2) ADJ + SVO, and (3) OBJ + SV, and likewise, three stages in focality in interrogative sentences: (1) canonical word order, (2) QUE/XP<sub>FOC</sub> canonical word order, and (3) (XP<sub>FOC</sub>) noncanonical word order (ADJ = adjuncts, XP = open phrase, FOC = focus, QUE = question).

Chapter 4 reviewed the empirical studies based on PT. First, I summarized the previous studies on English L2 learners and Japanese EFL learners. Next, my literature review focused on a longitudinal study of a Japanese L1 ESL child (Di Biase, Kawaguchi & Yamaguchi, 2015), which has become the model case to verify the Prominence Hypothesis. The chapter lastly identified the unsolved issues for discussion in the present study, that is, the need for (a) a larger-scale corpus, which includes earlier stages of EFL data, (b) an elaborate analysis of the acquisition process of "SVO," (c) an observation of learners' progress in adverb-fronting with a consideration of the flexibility in the L1 word order, and (d) an investigation of critical issues in interrogatives, such as *wh*-in-situ questions, which have not been attested in the PT literature, and the developmental relationship between Yes/No and *wh*-questions. Given these issues, Chapter 5 presented the main focus of my study and addressed five research questions (RQs), along with my hypotheses for the respective RQs.

Chapter 6 documented the methodology used for the data collection and analysis. My participants were 48 young Japanese EFL learners aged between 10 and 15 years, of which 24 were elementary school students and the other 24 were junior high school students. For the collection of L2 quasi-spontaneous speech data, five types of English oral tasks (i.e., picture identification, habitual actions, spot-the-differences, picture description, and creative skit) were assigned to each participant; the data were transcribed in the CHAT format to utilize the CLAN programs (MacWhinney, 2000). To analyze the 48 sets of data (i.e., 4,771 AS-units, 12,174 word tokens) cross-sectionally, I sorted the learners into groups according to the PT stages by analyzing 16 syntactic structures (Pienemann & Keßler, 2011). The acquisition criteria require two occurrences

of a structure in different contexts from a learner's utterances. Based on the PT stage groups, I performed distributional analyses on declaratives, Yes/No questions, *wh*-questions, and a combination of the two types of interrogatives to test the validity of the Prominence Hypothesis on my participants.

Chapter 7 presented the empirical findings for the five RQs including results of the distributional analyses and some excerpts from the speech production. The first section reported the validity of the PT in terms of its overall syntactic development. The implicational analysis revealed that the learners were distributed in the syntactic hierarchy from PT Stage 1 to 5 (with 6, 8, 6, 10, and 18 learners at each stage) with a strong scalability ( $r = .98$ ) (RQ 1). Additionally, the other developmental indices (i.e., lexical verb types, Guiraud Index, Mean Length of Utterance in words (MLUw), and the third person singular *-s*), overall, were relevant to the PT stages.

The second section of this chapter illustrated the developmental hierarchy of declaratives. Although the hierarchy was compatible with the Prominence Hypothesis, the canonical word order was not acquired as a default due to the beginning stage of SUBJ or copula/lexical verb ellipsis as well as the L1 word order sentences (SOV patterns) (RQ2). After acquiring the canonical word order, the learners did begin using adverb fronting, but its employment was significantly less frequent than that of the Japanese L1 ESL child (RQ 3).

The third section of the chapter reported the compatibility of the developmental hierarchy of Yes/No questions with the new hypothesis without any counterevidence. Furthermore, the *wh*-question development also followed the hypothesis, except for an earlier emergence of the copula verb *wh*-questions (WH COP SUBJ) (RQ 4). One noticeable finding here was the emergence of *wh*-in-situ questions. This empirical evidence supported the Prominence Hypothesis regarding the canonical word order stage of *wh*-question development. However, my extended analysis on the integration of the distributional tables of Yes/No and *wh*-questions revealed that “*Do* SVO” and “WH *do* SVO” emerged simultaneously beyond the stage boundary predicted by this new hypothesis. Similarly, target-like use of “*Does* SVO” and “WH *does* SVO,” as well as of “AUX be SV *-ing*” and “WH AUX *be* SV *-ing*” emerged in parallel (RQ 5).

Chapter 8 provided an interpretation of the empirical findings expounded in Chapter 7. First, the continuous overused/omitted copulas in declaratives may be affected by the L1 use of the Japanese postpositional particle *wa*, which is used to mark a subject but can be omitted in informal conversations. Second, compared to the ESL child, my participants used far fewer adverb-fronting structures. This indicates that the young EFL learners have restricted themselves to instructed structures due to their lack of experience in L2 natural interaction. Third, the parallel developmental trajectory between the emergence of Yes/No and *wh*-questions, which share common “prefabricated patterns” (Hakuta, 1974), and the early emergence of the copula verb *wh*-questions, is consistent with exemplar- and usage- based pathway of language learning (e.g., Eskildsen, 2015; Tomassello, 2003).

The final Chapter 9 concluded my dissertation by revisiting the main findings. As for theoretical implications, in the early stages of EFL learning, there seem to be two different developmental trajectories, where the copula verb sentences precede lexical verb sentences. This phenomenon seems to be affected by the frequency effects of language processing. Future research should consider the frequency effects in L2 syntactic development. As for pedagogical implications, the use of formulas as rote-learned chunks in the early stages would serve as pre-stage foundations for constructing L2 syntax. However, EFL instructors should bear in mind the necessity of creating diverse forms of interaction in L2 classrooms to facilitate discourse-pragmatic variation. Although the present study still has not accounted for other areas such as individual differences and the developmental relationship between syntax and morphology, the findings endorsed PT with new evidence and suggested some modifications. With the impending reformation of formalizing

English instruction at public elementary schools in 2020, English education at junior high schools would also need to be correspondingly restructured. The empirical data derived from the EFL learners in the present study would help with the constructive reformation of English education.