

Development of Referent Management in L2 Japanese: A Film Retelling Task

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Abstract

This article addresses how native speakers (NS) of Japanese and second language (L2) Japanese learners (at intermediate and advanced levels) manage the use of noun referential forms (NRF) in order to demonstrate topic continuity and discontinuity in a silent film retelling activity. Specifically, it examines voice alternations, the use of NRF in relation to their structural markedness, and the ability to distinguish discourse contexts by the use of NRF. These issues were investigated using a version of Chaudron and Parker's (1990) English model modified for Japanese. The result revealed that the learners developed referential topic management in the following ways. 1) The learners of higher proficiency level alternated active and passive voice to keep their focus on the main characters, just as was seen in the NS discourse. 2) The learners were largely able to differentiate NRF between discourse contexts irrespective of their proficiency levels; furthermore, the ability to do so correctly increased with proficiency. 3) More syntactically complex forms tended to be found in the discourse by the learners of higher proficiency. And lastly, 4) marking of definiteness preceded that of indefiniteness in L2 Japanese development. Limitations of the study were stated in the end in conjunction with several suggestions made for further research.

1. Background

1.1 Topic Continuity

NRF has received major attention as their proper use to denote topic continuity and discontinuity plays a key role in creating coherent discourse (Givón, 1995). Givón (1983) formulated the cross-linguistic topic continuity scale, and simply put, most continuous topics should be marked with a zero anaphora, and most discontinuous topics should be marked with full noun phrases. Topic continuity is

demonstrated differently among languages, and the way it is realized in English and Japanese will be shown in the subsequent sections with regard to 1) voice alternation, 2) discourse context types and the use of NRF, and 3) the use of NRF in relation to their structural markedness.

1.2 Voice Alternation and Topic Continuity

Berman and Slobin (1994) state that different perspectives would result in the production of various types of structures. Specifically, Bamberg (1994) argues that the speakers use passive structure in order to keep a main character in a foregrounded and topical position to make their narrative discourse fluent. In his German narrative analysis, he found that a voice alternation has a connection with topic continuity in the discourse as the speakers skillfully switch between active and passive voices in order to maintain the topicality of the main character. The same finding was observed in Berman and Slobin's English narratives and all of their adult NS produced passive forms at least once in order to keep the main character as the topic of their discourse.

A comparable finding was observed in a study which investigated Japanese oral narratives. Yanagimachi (2000) found that the NS participants in his study managed to maintain topic continuity via voice alternation in performing oral narratives. They constructed passive structures keeping the main characters in the subject position as patients. In other words, they fixed their viewpoints on the main characters in the story, rather than going back and forth to focus on different referents in the story. Interestingly, such an approach to topic continuity was not found in the nonnative speaker (NNS) data at any of the proficiency levels (beginner, intermediate or advanced) in his study, suggesting the difficulty of forming passive constructions and/or maintaining the focused view points on limited main characters in L2 narrative discourse.

1.3 Three discourse contexts types and NRF

Chaudron and Parker (1990) examined Japanese learners' acquisition of English noun phrases in discourse, relating the development of noun phrase use to the effect of both discourse and structural markedness. In their study, Chaudron and Parker defined topical noun phrases as "noun phrases that occur simultaneously as the theme of a particular sentence in the discourse, the agent semantically, and the subject syntactically, whether in initial position or existentially introduced" (1990: p.44).

The researchers divided discourse contexts into three types (new, known and current) and explored how topic noun phrases are encoded in each context. New context refers to a situation in which a noun referent is introduced into discourse for the first time, while known context refers to a case in which a referent has been introduced previously but is not the current topic of discourse. Current context refers to a circumstance where the referent is the on-going topic of discourse.

Chaudron and Parker clearly laid out how Japanese and English languages distinguish between these contexts following the results of previous studies (e.g. Givón, 1983 for English; Hinds, 1984 for Japanese), and they will be simplified for convenience as in the following table.

Table 1 NRF of English and Japanese within Discourse Contexts

REFER TO CURRENT TOPIC	INTRODUCE KNOWN REFERENT AS TOPIC	INTRODUCE NEW REFERENT AS TOPIC
[English] pronoun minimal noun	definite article or left dislocation + definite article ¹	indefinite article or existential + indefinite article
[Japanese] zero anaphora (∅)	postposition <i>wa</i>	postposition <i>ga</i>
Less Marked	<	More Marked

Furthermore, Chaudron and Parker argued that the least marked discourse context is a reference to the current topic, while introduction of a new referent as a topic would be the most marked context. This is because referring to the current topic requires the least amount of information processing capacity, while introducing a new topic requires the most information for processing (Chaudron and Parker, 1990: 47).

For Japanese, Hinds (1984) examined how a referent is marked with suffixal markers such as *wa* and *ga*, in terms of how a topic is continued/discontinued. He found that when a referent is introduced for the first time (i.e. when the information is new), it is marked by *ga*, then followed by zero anaphora unless there are ambiguity issues or rival topics. If such cases occur, the referent would be marked by *wa*. Thus, in general, a new referent is marked by *ga*, a known referent is marked by *wa* or zero anaphora, and zero anaphora is used to refer to the current topic of discourse (Hinds, 1980, 1984, 1987). Chaudron and Parker suggested the form,

NP+*wa*, for the introduction of a known referent as topic because that would indicate a topic switch from the previous topic, rather than the continuation of the topic (which should be indicated by zero anaphora) as in the current context. With this model, marking of a referent in the new context would be most discontinuous in the continuity scale, as it was never in the speaker/listener's consciousness previously. Introduction of a known referent into discourse also marks discontinuity of topic because such marking involves a mention of participants in the story that have moved in and out of the consciousness of the speaker/listener. Referring to the current topic is considered to be most continuous context, as it is the on-going topic of discourse and it is in the immediate consciousness of the speaker/listener.

In terms of the relationship between the learners' sensitivity to the discourse contexts and their proficiency level, research shows that both NS children and L2 learners seem to make distinctions between different contexts for NRF just as adult NSs do (e.g. Clancy, 1992 for L1 narrative study; Chaudron and Parker, 1990; Givón, 1984 for L2 narrative studies). In Chaudron and Parker's (1990) study, for instance, each proficiency level (beginning, intermediate and advanced) maintained a distinction between all three contexts (new, known and current), in terms of using structural forms in different degrees. However, the percentages change as proficiency increases; generally, the higher the proficiency of the NNSs, the more their NRF choices resembled those made by the NSs. It was also found in their study that lower proficiency level learners tended to overgeneralize the forms that are associated with least marked discourse context to more marked contexts. Specifically, pronouns that are used primarily in the current context by NSs were used to mark referents in all contexts by NNSs. Similar overgeneralization was found in the use of definite nouns. NSs tended to restrict such a use for a current or known context, whereas higher use of definiteness marking was found in the new context by NNSs. This result supports the overgeneralized use of definiteness marking to other contexts found in Andersen (1977) and Huebner (1983).

The acquisition order of definiteness preceding that of indefiniteness was also documented in Doi and Yoshioka (1990) and Sakamoto (1993). To be specific, the acquisition of *wa* preceded that of *ga* in L2 Japanese acquisition. The same acquisition order was observed in Clancy (1985) for L1 Japanese acquisition, suggesting an early use of definiteness marking. It should be noted here that both Doi and Yoshioka (1990) and Sakamoto (1993) identified accuracy order as acquisition order using interview data and cloze testing, respectively. Thus, the present study

attempts to confirm the seemingly universal pattern of marking definiteness/indefiniteness in L2 Japanese by employing the use of a different data elicitation method, i.e. silent movie retelling.

1.4 NRF and Structural Markedness

The relationship between structural markedness and L2 acquisition in oral narratives was also investigated by Chaudron and Parker (1990). Markedness was defined by the researchers, citing Eckman et al. (1986), “Markedness is a description of a relationship that is based on the least marked member of a set, being either more frequent cross-linguistically, simpler structurally, having a wider distribution within a particular language.” (1990: 47). Chaudron and Parker found that the more marked structures were observed as proficiency increased. This is an interesting area for investigation in narratives. For instance, in order to introduce a new referent to a discourse, one might expect to elaborate the referent by the use of structures such as existential forms. Existential indefinite nouns (for instance, “there was a girl named...””) are considered the highest form in structural markedness on the scale proposed by Chaudron and Parker’s (1990) study. The assumption is that the complexity of the structure is determined by the degree of syntactization of the structure (Givon, 1983), and by the accumulation of the structure (O’Grady, 1987). According to Chaudron and Parker, the least marked form in English is zero anaphora, whereas existential indefinite noun and left-dislocated definite noun would be the most marked forms. In terms of structural markedness in Japanese, the following scale is proposed in the present study (Table 2), following the assumption used for English in Chaudron and Parker’s (1990) study.

Table 2 Structural Markedness in Japanese

less marked	more marked
\emptyset anaphora < Bare Noun (+ <u>ga/wa</u>) < Demonstrative + Noun (+ <u>ga/wa</u>) < Noun + Noun (+ <u>ga/wa</u>) < Relative Clause + Pronoun (+ <u>ga/wa</u>) Adjective+noun (+ <u>ga/wa</u>) Noun (+ <u>ga/wa</u>)	

The reason why noun + noun is located higher in the structural markedness scale than demonstratives + noun is that in order to connect nouns, a particle needs to be inserted between the nouns. For instance, in order to list nouns in Japanese, to must be inserted, such as Taroo to Hanako ga (Taroo and Hanako). To modify a noun

with another noun, on the other hand, *no* is required, such as *pan'ya no otoko no hito* (the male person from the bakery shop). *To* in the noun phrase in the former example operates as a connective (and), whereas *no* in the noun phrases in the latter example is a noun modifier. When a noun is preceded by demonstratives or adjectives, on the other hand, nothing needs to be inserted, and therefore these structures are less marked than noun + noun in terms of the accumulation of the structure following O'Grady's (1987) definition of markedness. Relative clauses are considered the most marked form due to the complexity and accumulation of structure. For instance, a referent can be expressed in the following way using a relative clause:

eega no zenhan de otoosan ga nakunatta onna no hito ga
 movie GEN first part at father NOM die-PAST female GEN person SUB

pan'ya de pan o nusumimashita
 bread shop at bread ACC steal-PAST

'The woman whose father passed away in the first half of the movie stole a loaf of bread at a bread shop.'

The bolded part consists of a head noun (the woman) and a relative clause (whose father passed away in the first half of the movie). In Japanese, relative clauses seem to be a problematic area of acquisition for learners of Japanese due to the following reasons. First, only plain forms of the verbs, nouns and adjectives should be used inside the relative clause. However, the regular polite forms are frequently used in most other structures, and some learners tend to use the polite forms inside of the relative clause, which makes their sentences rather ungrammatical. Second, if the subject inside the relative clause is different from that of the head noun of the relative clause (which is the case in the above example), only *ga* (not *wa*) must be used to mark the subject of the relative clause. Because of the complexity of the structures and the regulations involved in such formations, the degree of syntactization of the structure can be said to be higher than the other forms discussed above. In addition, relative clauses involve the accumulation of structure inside the clause; thus, it deserves to be located at the highest end of the structural markedness scale.

In relation to the discourse contexts discussed in the previous section, relative

clauses would most likely appear in an “introduction of known referent” (such as in “*Eega no zenhan de otoosan ga nakunatta onna no hito o oboetemasu ka?*” meaning, “Do you remember the girl whose father passed away in the first half of the movie?”), or in an “introduction of a new referent” (such as in “*sore o ichibushijuu miteita onna no hito ga*” meaning, “a woman who was watching the whole thing”). However, the appearance of such a form in the current topic context would not normally be expected.

In terms of the acquisition of referential forms in its relation to structural markedness, research shows that less marked structural forms (zero anaphora) are acquired before more marked forms (e.g. Hyams, 1986; Bates and MacWhinney, 1979 for L1 acquisition, and White, 1985; Gundel, Stenson and Tarone, 1984 for L2 acquisition). Thus structurally speaking, zero anaphora would normally be expected to be acquired most easily, while acquisition of relative clause structures would occur much later in Japanese language acquisition.

However, contradicting results were found in Polio (1995) and Yanagimachi (2000). In her investigation of the acquisition of anaphora in L2 Chinese by English and Japanese L1 speakers, Polio (1995) found that many instances of the occurrences of zero anaphora were not observed at the low proficiency level. Its production increased with L2 proficiency and moved toward target-like numbers. Additionally, it was also found that there was no significant difference between the Japanese and English speakers' use of zero anaphora in Chinese, although more superior performance might be expected by the speakers of Japanese which shares the same system for marking most continuous referents (i.e. zero anaphora) with Chinese.

Yanagimachi (2000) examined referential choice in first/second-person reference and third-person reference contexts in L2 Japanese narrative discourse. It was found that the acquisition of zero anaphora for first and second pronoun positions in Japanese was acquired more easily by English speakers compared to third person zero pronouns. Yanagimachi explains that the context of first and second person narratives had a more stable topic in that the theme of the narration was centered on one specific viewpoint. In other words, in both first and second person narratives the protagonists were “me” and “you”, respectively, and once they were introduced with full NPs, they could be continued with zero anaphora naturally. Third person narratives, on the other hand, did not require such a viewpoint establishment, and it was up to the speaker to determine who the protagonists were and take charge of

narrating the event in a coherent manner. Interestingly, it was found that NSs tended to focus on a limited set of characters, treated them as protagonists, and used several strategies to keep the same characters in the position of the discourse topic. Due to the fact that these speakers kept the same topic/referents in the subject position, treating them as the main discourse topic, they used zero anaphora continuously. In learner discourse, however, the use of zero anaphora (for third person narratives) was less frequent, mainly due to switching referents in the subject position.

Keeping these unpredicted results of the production of zero anaphora in mind, the present study will examine whether the least marked form on the syntactic markedness scale in Japanese (i.e. zero anaphora) is easy to acquire based on the proposal made by Chaudron and Parker (1990).

Considering the results of the relevant L1 and L2 studies discussed above, this study examines the following predictions.

Predictions:

1. The ability to manage voice alternation to maintain high topicality of the main characters in the story develops with proficiency.
2. The learners will employ different forms in order to differentiate between discourse contexts despite their proficiency levels. However, more target-like use of NRF to mark discourse context will increase with proficiency.
3. Marking of definiteness will precede that of indefiniteness in learner discourse.
4. Learners will develop more syntactically complex forms as their proficiency increases.

2. Study

2.1 Method

2.1.1 Participants

Participants in the study were eleven American learners of Japanese (five intermediate-level and six advanced-level) at a major U.S. university and six NSs of Japanese who reside in Japan with no regular exposure to English or living in an English-speaking country. These participants were conveniently drawn from two of the Japanese classes offered by the university. They were a subset of a larger pool of participants from seven different foreign language programs at the university.

2.1.2 Task

The participants watched a 20-minute silent movie – Charlie Chaplin’s “Modern Times” – with their NS conversational partners. After watching the first half of the movie, the NSs left the room and would therefore not know how the story continued and ended. The NNSs’ task was then to narrate to their NS partners the second half of the movie orally.² Narratives were tape-recorded for later transcription and analysis.

2.2 Analysis

2.2.1 Coding

Referents were coded in the following ways. First, all the referents that were introduced to discourse for the first time in the subject position were coded as ‘introduction of a new referent as topic’ (New Context). Second, when previously introduced referents are introduced again in the subject position, they are coded as ‘introduction of known referent as topic’ (Known Context). Last, when referents are on-going topics of discourse (in the subject position), they were coded as ‘referring to the current topic’ (Current Context).

To examine Prediction 1, the total occurrences of the passive constructions were counted. The distributional pattern of the use of passive structures was also examined. For prediction 4, the participants’ production of NRF on the structural markedness scale by context will be demonstrated in terms of percentage.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Voice alternations

All the data were examined in terms of the use of the passive constructions. Passive voice was never used by the intermediate level learners. In contrast, all the NSs and three advanced level learners used the passive structures in their narratives. Eight occurrences of the passive construction were found in the advanced level narratives, whereas NSs produced 15 instances of such constructions. Interestingly, patients of the passive structures found in both NS and NNS narratives were either Chaplin or his girlfriend, the two key characters in the story. As a result, the peripheral characters (such as a police officer) were demoted to the agentive position. Thus it seems that the use of passive formation is motivated to continue the topicality of the important characters. In other words, these speakers focused their attention on them, rather than switching back and forth to focus on different

referents in the story. As these speakers kept the same referential topics in the subject position and treated them as the main topic of on-going discourse, zero anaphora was used to mark such a function. Therefore, the production of passive construction might have contributed to the higher occurrences of zero anaphora in the current context in the advanced level group, as compared to their lower level learner counterpart. This finding of the passive constructions supports Prediction 1 which states that ‘the ability to manage voice alternation to maintain high topicality of the main characters in the story develops with proficiency’.

3.2 NRF marking by discourse context (New, Known and Current)

Table 3 illustrates the production of NRF by context (results in percentages by each group). These results are also displayed in graphic manners in Figures 1, 2 and 3.

Table 3 Production of NRF by Context

Group	∅	NP- <i>wa</i>	NP- <i>ga</i>
Context 1: Current topic			
Intermediate	56.0	40.1	3.9
Advanced	89.5	7.0	3.5
NS	83.0	7.0	10.0

Context 2: Known topic			
Intermediate	12.5	72.9	14.6
Advanced	3.1	54.5	42.4
NS	5.8	55.8	38.4

Context 3: New topic			
Intermediate	11.1	61.1	27.8
Advanced	4.8	23.8	71.4
NS	—	10.0	90.0

As Table 3 and Figures 1, 2, and 3 show, NS and Advanced level learners showed very similar patterns. For instance, in these two groups, zero anaphora was the one and only prominent topic marker in current topic context (83% for NS; 89.5% for Advanced), whereas intermediate level learners also show the preference for NP-*wa*, as well as zero anaphora to mark the current topic (NP-*wa* 40.1%; zero anaphora 56%). The use of NP-*ga* in NS data in current topic context seems a little high (10.0%), and this could be explained by the fact that five occurrences of NP-*ga* out

Figure 1 Production of NRF in the Current Context

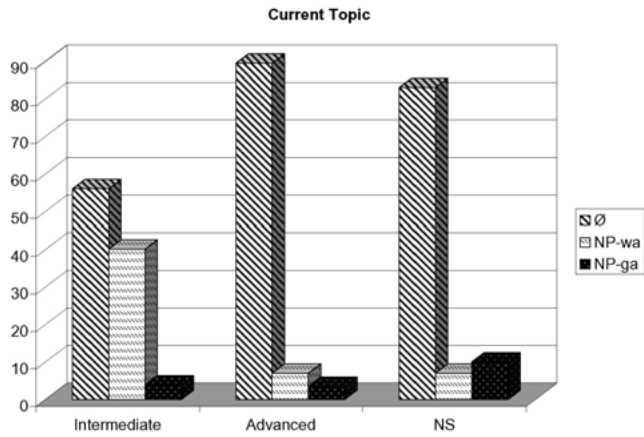


Figure 2 Production of NRF in the Known Context

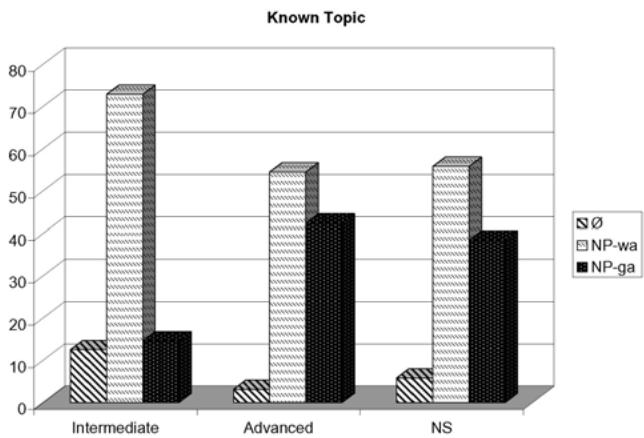
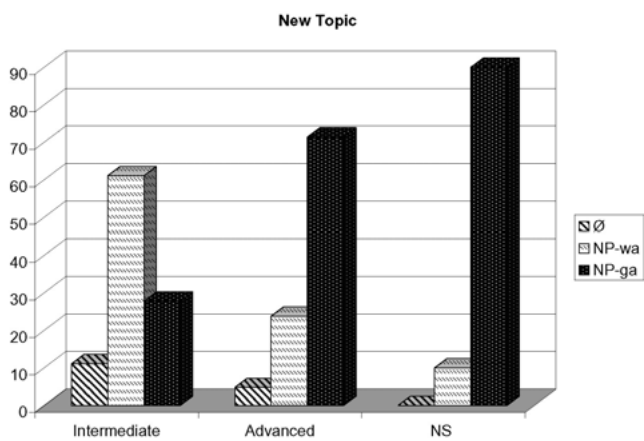


Figure 3 Production of NRF in the New Context



of 11 were reflexive pronoun-*ga* (*zibun-ga*). The NSs used *zibun-ga* (himself) to depict Chaplin when they wanted to place an emphasis on his action of pretending to be the thief in order to protect the woman he liked. Thus, besides this emphasis by the use of reflexive pronoun, the NSs more or less stuck to zero anaphora for the current topic.

In the known topic context, on the other hand, the intermediate learners showed a great deal of preference for the usage of NP-*wa* (72.9%), whereas the proportional use of NP-*wa* was little over 50% by the advanced level learners and NSs. Quite a few instances of NP-*ga* were observed by higher level proficiency learners and the NSs for this context. Lower level learners, on the other hand, displayed much lower percentage use of NP-*ga*. In introducing a new referent as a topic, a large majority of the NS and advanced learners' productions were found to be NP-*ga* (90% for NS group and 71.4% for advanced level learner group), while the use of such form by intermediate learners was only 27.8%. They preferred NP-*wa* (61.1%) to introduce a new topic than any other form.

Notice that even lower level learners used more attenuated forms to mark topics in the current context (56% use of zero anaphora), whereas the majority of marking of known topic and new topic was done by *wa* (72.9% and 61.1%, respectively). The higher proportional use of NP-*ga* for marking a new topic than a known topic by lower level learners also suggests that the learners attempt to distinguish between discourse context by managing to use different forms. Therefore, the first half of Prediction 2 which states that 'the learners will employ different forms in order to differentiate between discourse contexts despite their proficiency levels' was supported. The second half of Prediction 2 which claims that 'more target-like use of NRF to mark discourse context will increase with proficiency' was also supported in that the NRF use by the advanced level resembled those by the NSs in all three contexts.

With regards to definiteness and indefiniteness markings, as Table 3 and Figures 1, 2, and 3 demonstrate, the use of NP-*wa* by the intermediate level learners surpasses the production of such form by their advanced level and NS counterparts in all three contexts. Most notable pattern was found in the new context. The majority of marking was done by NP-*wa*, where NP-*ga* was expected as it is a marker for encoding new information. In the current context, much higher percentage use of NP-*wa* was found in the intermediate level learners' narratives as compared to their advanced level and NS counterparts. The overuse of NP-*wa* resulted in the

underuse of zero anaphora in the current context for the low level learners. Given the smaller percentage use of NP-*ga* by intermediate level learners for marking not only the new context but also the known context, along with the overuse of NP-*wa*, it can be concluded that the acquisition of definiteness marking precedes that of indefiniteness marking, and thus supports Prediction 3.

3.3 Structural markedness

Table 4 illustrates the percentage use of NRF on the structural markedness scale by context. Figures 4, 5, and 6 present the data in a graphic manner to depict the patterns clearly.

Table 4 Structural Markedness Scale Results by Context (results in percentages by level group)³

Group	∅	Bare Noun/ Pronoun	Demonstratives +noun/ Adj.+N	N+N	Dem.+ N+N	N+N+N (or +more N/D) ⁴	RC
Current							
IM	56.0	31.9	—	10.4	1.7	—	—
AD	89.5	9.3	—	1.2	—	—	—
NS	83	11.0	6.0	—	—	—	—

Known							
IM	12.5	56.9	2.0	20.7	2.0	3.9	2.0
AD	3.1	74.6	1.6	11.1	4.8	3.2	1.6
NS	5.8	56.9	15.7	5.9	3.9	5.9	5.9

New							
IM	11.1	71.2	11.8	5.9	—	—	—
AD	4.8	52.3	4.8	4.8	9.5	9.5	14.3
NS	—	38.0	3.4	6.9	3.4	6.9	41.4

IM=Intermediate Level Group, AD=Advanced Level Group

As is shown in Table 4 and Figures 4, 5 and 6, NS and the advanced group show some similarities in the use of NP structures. Most noticeable similarities were found in the current and new contexts. In the current context, the majority of the markers for the topic in both groups was zero anaphora (∅) (89.5% for advanced group and 83% for NS), whereas bare noun/pronoun marker usage was as much as 31% for the intermediate level learner group.

The advanced and NS groups showed further similarities in the new context in that they both utilized relative clauses, though the difference in percentages were

Figure 4 Structural Markedness in the Current Context

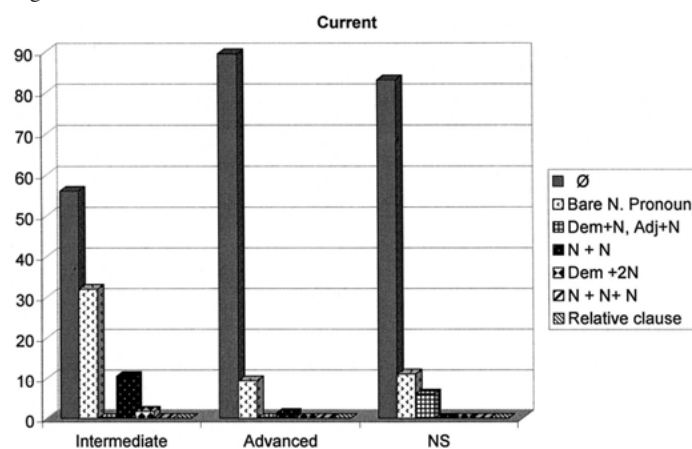


Figure 5 Structural Markedness in the Known Context

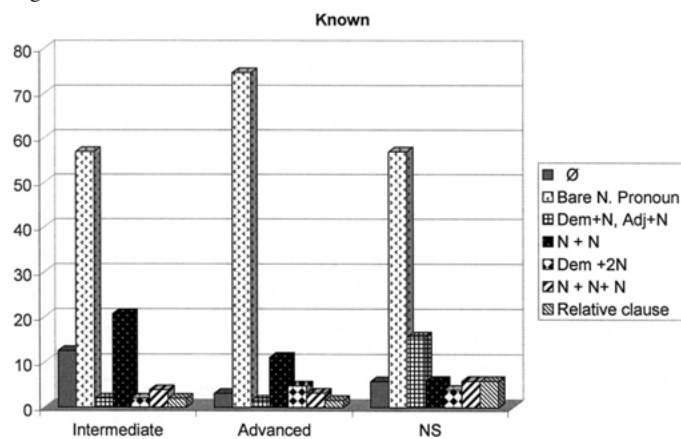
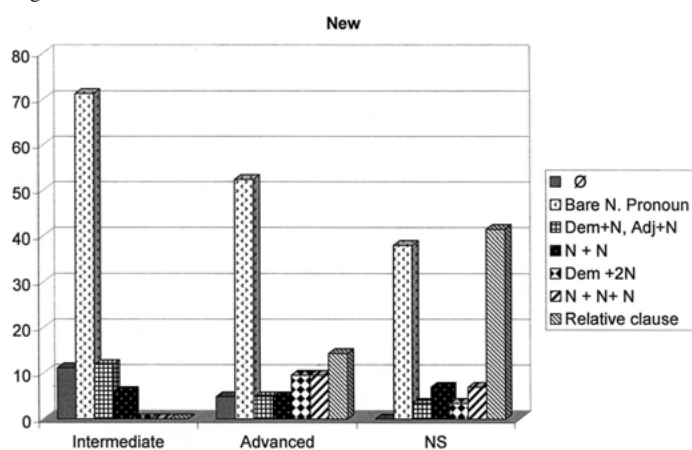


Figure 6 Structural Markedness in the New Context



quite big (14.3% for advanced group; 41.4% for the NS group). Notice that the intermediate group did not produce relative clauses in their discourse for any context except for 2% in the known context. Recall that newly introduced information should be most marked, since it is hardest to identify, while the current topic should be most continuous and be the least marked (Chaudron and Parker, 1990). Both NS and advanced learners' distributional characteristics of NPF can be explained by Chaudron and Parker's argument in that both groups used relative clauses (the most marked form on the structural markedness scale for Japanese) to introduce new characters, whereas they used zero anaphora for the current topic (the least marked form). Besides the use of relative clauses, for the new context, the use of noun modification 1) with more than two nouns to modify another noun 2) and demonstrative plus two nouns were found in the advanced level group, but not in the intermediate level group. However, these small numbers of occurrences cannot provide enough evidence to make a definite claim. Therefore, Prediction 4 which states that learners will develop more syntactically complex forms as their proficiency increases is partially supported with regard to the use of relative clauses and further investigation on this topic is recommended to draw definite conclusions in terms of the acquisition of syntactic complexity in L2 Japanese.

The positive relationship between syntactic complexity and acquisition ease cannot explain the underproduction of zero anaphora in the current study, as such a form has the least amount of complexity and the least marking on the markedness scale, and thus should be easy to acquire. Recall that previous studies (Polio, 1995; Yanagimachi, 2000) also showed the difficulty of the production of zero anaphora by lower level learners. Detailed examinations of data in the current study suggest that lower level learners tended to face some linguistics challenges during the course of narrating the story. Lower level speakers tended to jump back and forth from one topic to another, as they frequently stumbled with vocabulary and conjugation, and when that happens they start a complete new sentence changing a topic of discourse. As the findings of the present study (as well as those of the previous ones) indicate, even if a form has the least linguistic marking system, that does not guarantee easy acquisition. In short, the linguistic markedness alone cannot fully explain the complicated L2 acquisition process.

In relation to the use of NRF and discourse contexts, many instances of the use of the pronoun (third person pronoun *kare* [he] *kanojo* [she] *karera* [they]) were found in NNS discourse. There were no occurrences of third person pronoun in NS

narratives, which is consistent with Clancy's (1980) findings on L1 oral narratives. A total frequency of pronoun use at the intermediate level was 29 times, whereas the advanced learners used pronouns 14 times in their narrations.⁵ Since the use of third person pronouns is the most common structure to mark the current topic in English, it seems that the use of pronouns could be explained by L1 influence. Pronouns are expected to appear in current context if they are used appropriately. Learners at both levels seemed to be able to distinguish discourse context with the use of pronouns; for instance, there was only one occurrence of a pronoun in the new context for each group, while there were 28 and 13 occurrences of pronouns in the other contexts for the intermediate and advanced groups, respectively. In the advanced group, pronouns made up 20.6% of the NRF in the known context and 7.8% in the current context, whereas the known and current percentages of NRF for the intermediate group were 41.2% and 15.5%, respectively.⁶

Qualitative analysis reveals some differences between the two groups in terms of the use of pronouns in a given context. Some less proficient learners used the third person pronouns *kare* (he) and *kanojo* (she) when there was more than one possible referent of the same gender (a main character and a peripheral character) in the context, which made their narrative confusing. It is illustrated in the excerpt below.

Excerpt 1: Intermediate Speaker, J3, and her interlocutor, I.

J3: ano ano keisatsu sorekara keisatsu wa ano okane o
 um um police then police TOP um money OBJ
harawanakereba naranai
 pay must
 'um the police has to pay money'

I: aa hontoo ni?
 Oh true
 'Oh really?'

J3: ano ano kare wa ano jeiru ni ikana ikanakerebanaranai kara
 um um he TOP um jail to go go must because
 'um..um..since he has to go to a jail'.

In this excerpt, one would assume that the pronoun, *kare* in line 3 would be the police officer as he has become the topic of discourse with the *wa*-marking in line 1. However, the speaker was actually referring to Chaplin. In the speaker's mind, the topic was still Chaplin since she was talking about Chaplin before this excerpt. Topic switch is so powerful that the referent is usually reintroduced by the *wa*-marking in Japanese narrative (see relevant discussion in Clancy and Downing, 1987). Thus, by marking the police with *wa*, the speaker gave the listener the impression that the topic was switched to the police from Chaplin. This type of confusion caused by the use of pronouns was observed in the other intermediate level learners' data. However, advanced learners were able to manage to use pronouns in more lucid manners. This provided another clear example of how referent management skills develop as proficiency increases.

4. Conclusion

This small-scale quasi-experimental study showed how learners of L2 Japanese developed referential management in order to attain topic continuity in the oral narrative discourse. Voice alternation was observed in the advanced level learner data. The patients of the passive constructions were all main characters (i.e. Charlie Chaplin and his girlfriend) and they were marked with zero anaphora, which indicates the high continuity of their topicality. The agents were peripheral characters and they were demoted to a non-topical position, in order to maintain the high topicality on the key characters. Learners were able to distinguish discourse context by the use of syntactic forms with differing complexity. For instance, the least complex form (i.e. zero anaphora) was generally the form used the most to mark topics in current context in both the learner and NS narratives. The amount of use of zero anaphora reached target-like numbers at the advanced level. The use of a structurally complex form (i.e. relative clause) was found to mark introduction of a new topic by NSs and such attempts were made by advanced level learners but not lower level learners, suggesting the developmental trend that learners' use of more syntacticized forms increase with proficiency. The study also showed that the definiteness marking precedes that of indefiniteness marking, supporting the previous studies in L2 English (Andersen, 1977; Huebner, 1983) and L2 Japanese (Doi and Yoshioka, 1990; Sakamoto, 1993).

Limitations of the study include a small number of participants in the study and as a result, the use of robust statistical test was avoided. The L1 background of the

subjects in the present study was limited to English, thus selecting learners of Japanese from different L1 backgrounds would shed light on the current findings in terms of the universality of the acquisition pattern. Specifically, selecting learners of Japanese whose L1 share similar structural characteristics to Japanese, such as Korean (in that they both are subject prominent and topic prominent languages) is recommended (See Nakahama, 2003). Use of different types of data elicitation methods on the performance of narrative production has been shown to affect performance (Robinson, 1995; Yoshioka, 1991). Given that the elicitation method used by the current study and the related previous studies was narration of a film (Clancy, 1980; Polio, 1995, Yanagimachi, 2000 for eliciting third person pronoun), use of more than one method might lead us to a better understanding of language learning processes.

Notes

- ¹ Chaudron and Parker (1990) note that a left-dislocated definite noun is used to refer to an already introduced referent in conversational English, citing Givón (1983). Thus, this particular form might not be directly pertinent to the current study, due to the fact that the conversation is dialogic as compared to the monologic nature of narratives.
- ² This research procedure was adapted from Klein and Perdue (1992).
- ³ These forms (except for zero anaphora) were followed by postpositional markers.
- ⁴ One instance of N+N+N+Dem.+N+N was observed in NS data.
- ⁵ Due to the fact that there is asymmetry in the number of participants in the two groups, the total number of frequency was normalized.
- ⁶ These numbers do not coincide with those in Table 5, as they include the occurrences of bare nouns.

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