

Needs of explicit instructions of English prosody for Japanese EFL learners

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Conference Room, 2nd floor of Building A,
Graduate School of Language and Culture, Osaka University, Toyonaka campus



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- “A linguistic element is defined as a focus if and only if it has **no antecedent**, either explicit or implicit, in a given discourse.” (Okazaki 1998: 6)
- “representational focus” - a linguistic element that has the status of “**new information**,” whether it bears a pitch accent or not. (Rochemont 1986)
- “**an answer to the *wh* constituent in a *wh*-question**; the most important and prominent constituent in a sentence; a non-presupposed part of the sentence” (Zubizarreta 1998)

New information focus is manifested differently across languages (Gut & Pillai 2014).

English – prosodic focus marking

- (1) a. What did John eat?
b. He ate the [**cake**]_F.
- (2) a. Who ate the cake?
b. [**John**]_F ate it.

Japanese – • morphological focus marking

GA is used for exhaustive-listing/focus marking.
(Kuno, 1973)

- (3) a. [**Taroo**]_F-**GA** dokushin desu.
‘Taro is single.’
b. [**Nishi no hoo**]_F-**GA** ame ga taihen desu.
‘It is in the west that the rain is a nuisance.’
(Haycock, 2008: (16))
- (4) [_F **Aoyama**]-ga aniyome-ni erimaki-o anda (Ishihara, 2011)

‘default’ prosodic structure—If no contrastive focus, the default prominence is on the left edge.

- ▪ **L1 transfer** – an interference phenomenon observed in L2 acquisition where L2 differs from L1.
(Gass & Selinker, 1983; Lardiere, 2007; White, 1989).
- ▪ **Prosody** – suprasegmental elements of speech such as pitch, duration, and intensity.
- Prosody – in the PF component

Purpose: To give an argument for the needs of explicit instructions of prosody for Japanese L2 learners

=> Do we need to give explicit instructions of prosody to Japanese EFL learners? Why?

1. How much do they know which word is focused in an utterance?
2. How accurately are they able to produce the focus word?
3. How properly are they able to hear the focus word?

Research Questions

Tasks for students:

- (i) focus word identification task (comprehension task)
- (ii) production task
- (iii) perception task

Participants:

- 32 native speakers of Japanese undergrads at a university in Shizuoka, Japan
- EFL learners at A2 level (CEFR) (lower intermediate)
- Average TOEIC score 465.9

Methods

[Dialog 1]

A: That's a beautiful picture.

B: My father took it.

A: Where was it taken?

B: It was taken in **Hokkaido**.

[Dialog 2]

A: Shall we go fishing tomorrow?

B: Good idea. What time shall we meet?

A: Let's meet at **six**.

B: At six? It's hard for me to get up so early.

[Dialog 3]

A: Do you like Japanese food?

B: Yes, I like it very much.

A: What kind do you like?

B: Oh, I like **sushi** the best. It's popular in Australia these days.

[Dialog 4]

A: What are you doing?

B: I'm making a **windmill** which really works.

A: That's great. I think windmills are useful for our future.

- In the **comprehension** task, the students were asked to read scripts of short dialogs silently first, and to underline the word which should have the “strongest” word for each sentence.
- In the **production** task, the students were paired up and assigned to play a role of either talker A or B, and to read it aloud.
- In the **perception** task, the students were asked to listen to an audio of sentences read by a native speaker of English, and to mark the word that they perceived the strongest in each sentence.

Methods

P-Score analysis

“Rapid Prosody Transcription method” (Cole 2014, Mo, Cole & Lee 2008)

- without any visual inspection of the recorded speech, they are asked to identify the word as prominent.

P-Score = Probabilistic scores for prominence perception

Our study here:

P-Scores for perception: Probabilistic scores for prominence perception

P-Scores for production: Probabilistic scores for prominence production

P-Scores for comprehension: Probabilistic scores for prominence comprehension

Method

- A **p-score** of **0** : all participants agree that the word is **not** prominent
- A **p-score** of **1** : all participants agree that the word is prominent
- values between 0 and 1 shows disagreement among participants.

The prosody scores can be viewed as a measure of **the probability** that a participant in a same speech community will mark/produce/perceive a given word as **prominent** (Cole et al. 2014) (cf. Gabor, Mizuguchi, Yamato 2014)

RESULTS I:

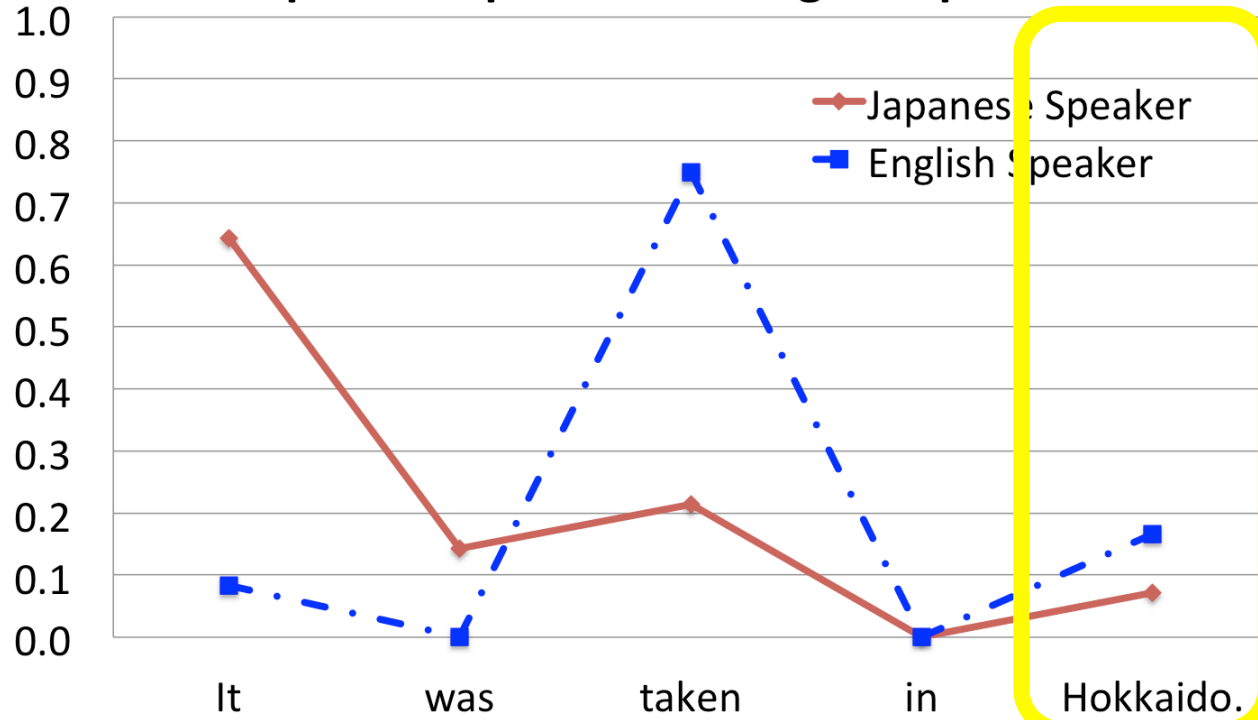
p-scores on production:

English speakers vs. Japanese speakers

Highest pitches were compared
between Japanese speakers and English speakers
(= 12 North American English speakers).

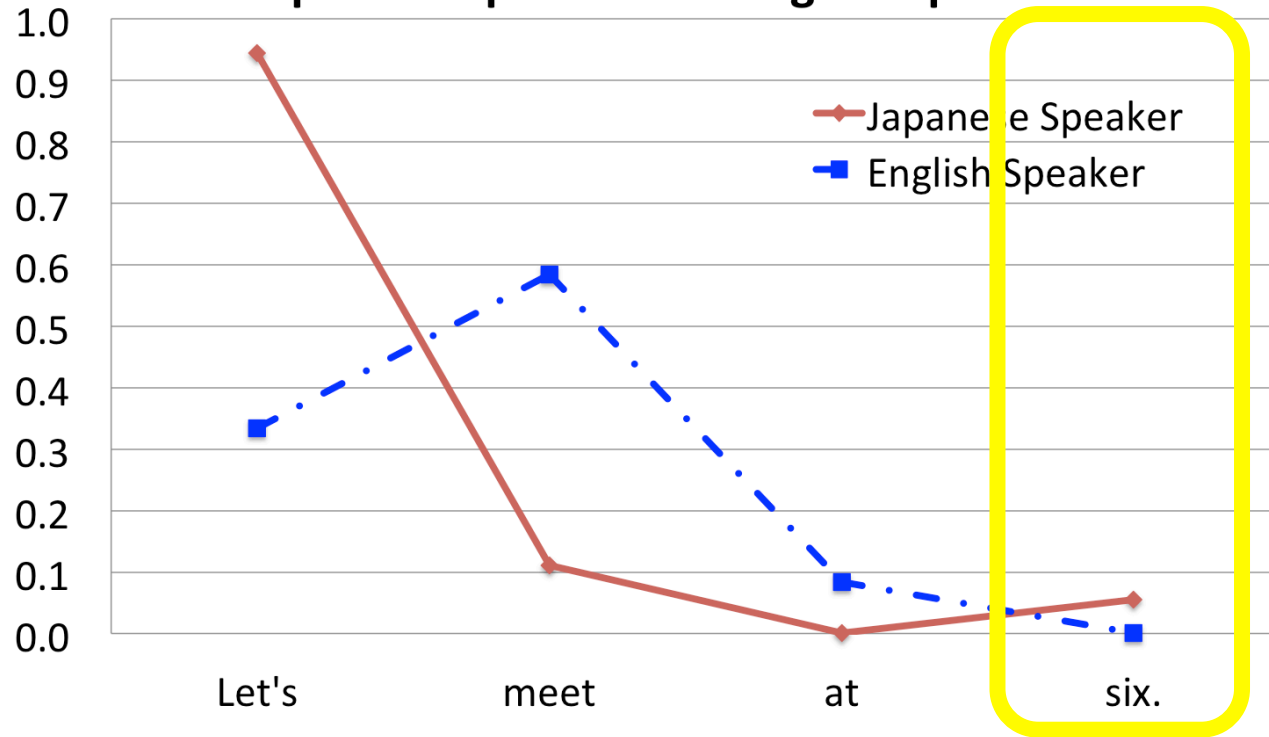
Spearman/Kendall's correlation

P-Scores on Production: Japanese Speakers VS English Speakers



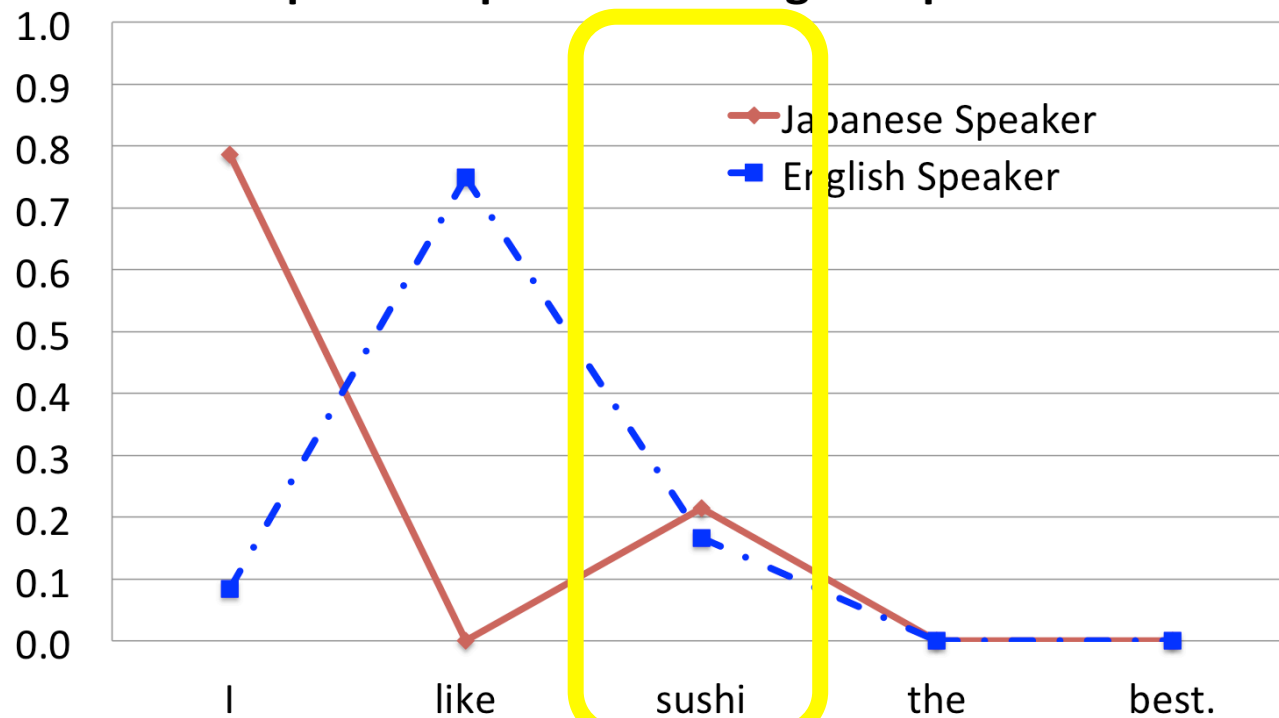
Focused sentence

P-Scores on Production: Japanese Speakers VS English Speakers



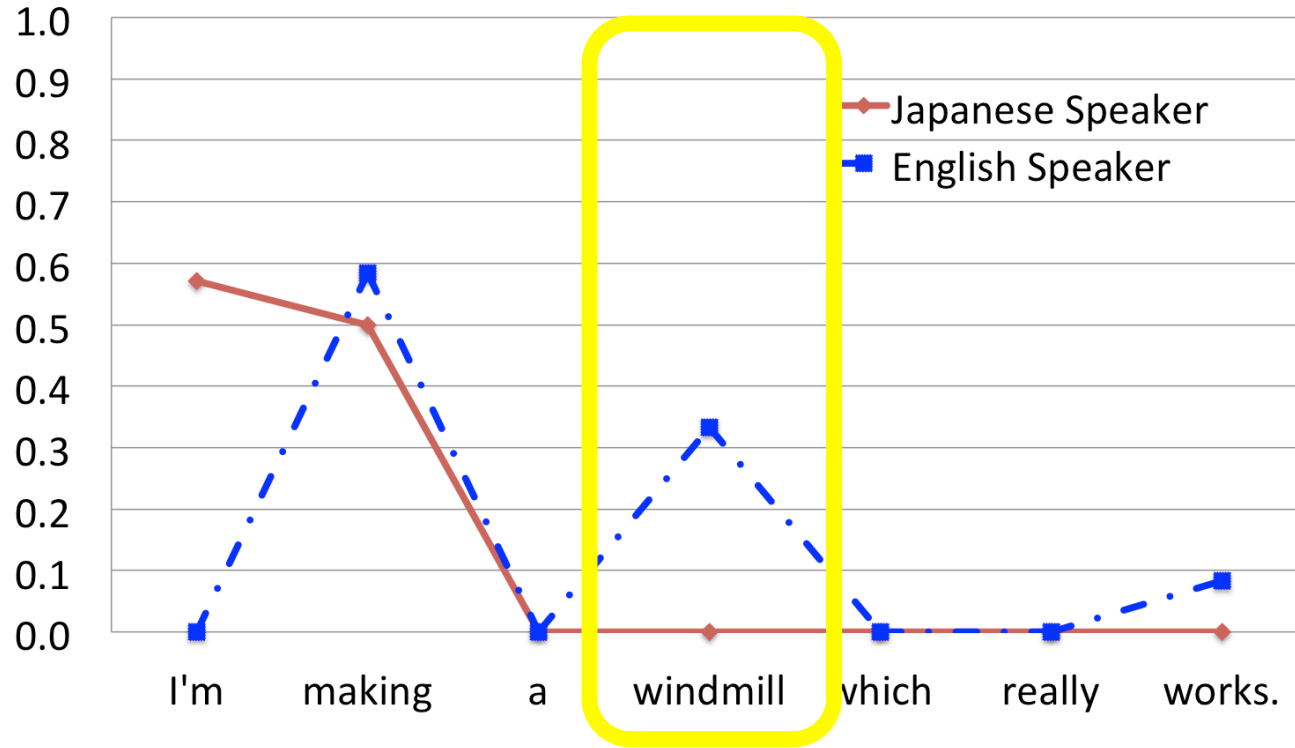
Focused sentence

P-Scores on Production: Japanese Speakers VS English Speakers



Focused sentence

P-Scores on Production: Japanese Speakers VS English Speakers

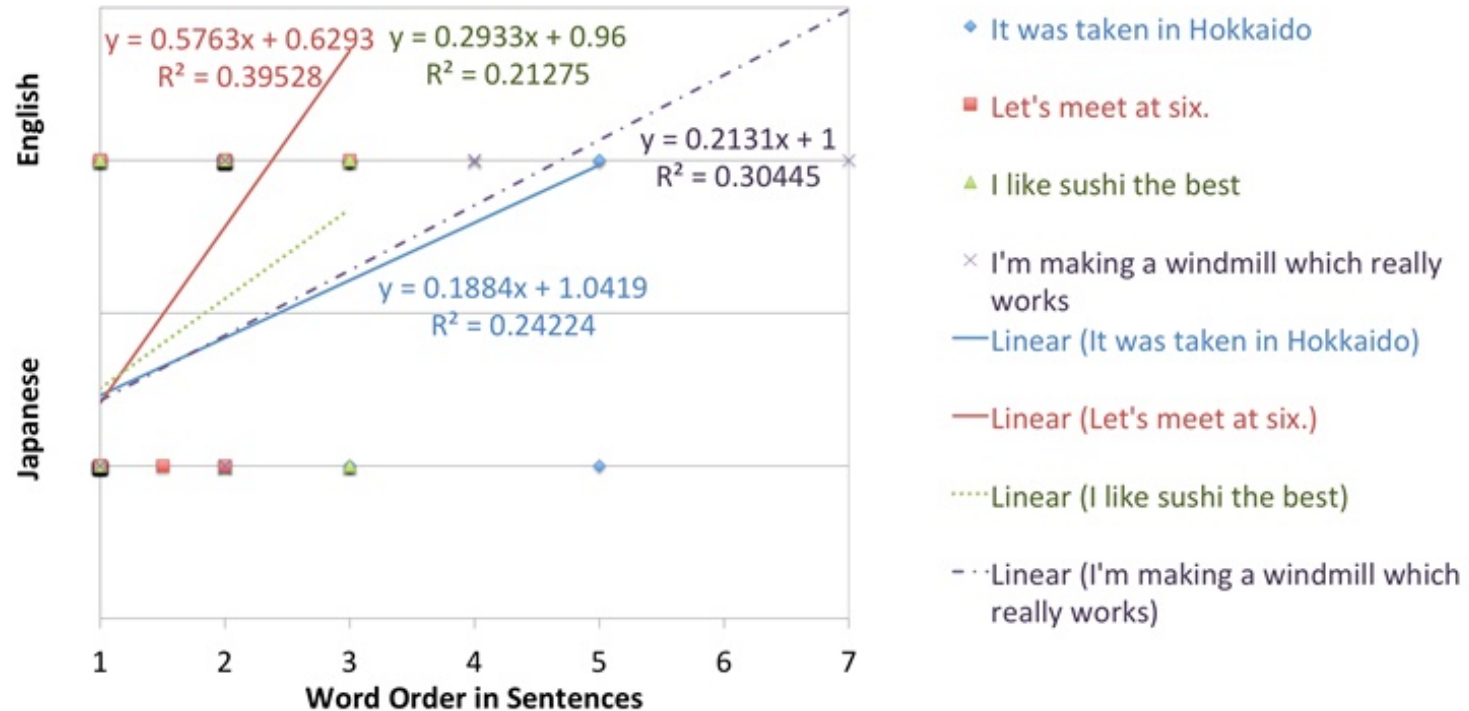


Focused sentence

RESULTS

- ◆ Japanese speakers tend to have prominence toward the **left** edge.
- ◆ English speakers can have a prominence depending on their interpretations.

Spearman for Edge Effect

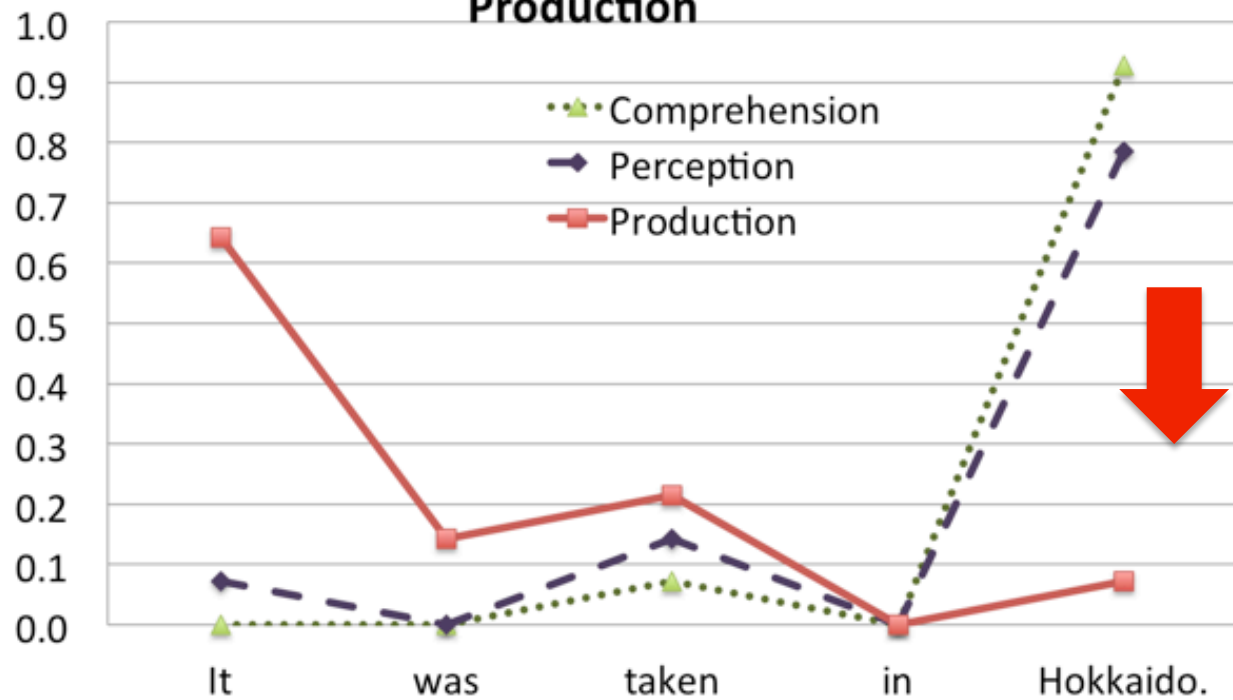


Production: Japanese vs. English speakers

RESULTS II:

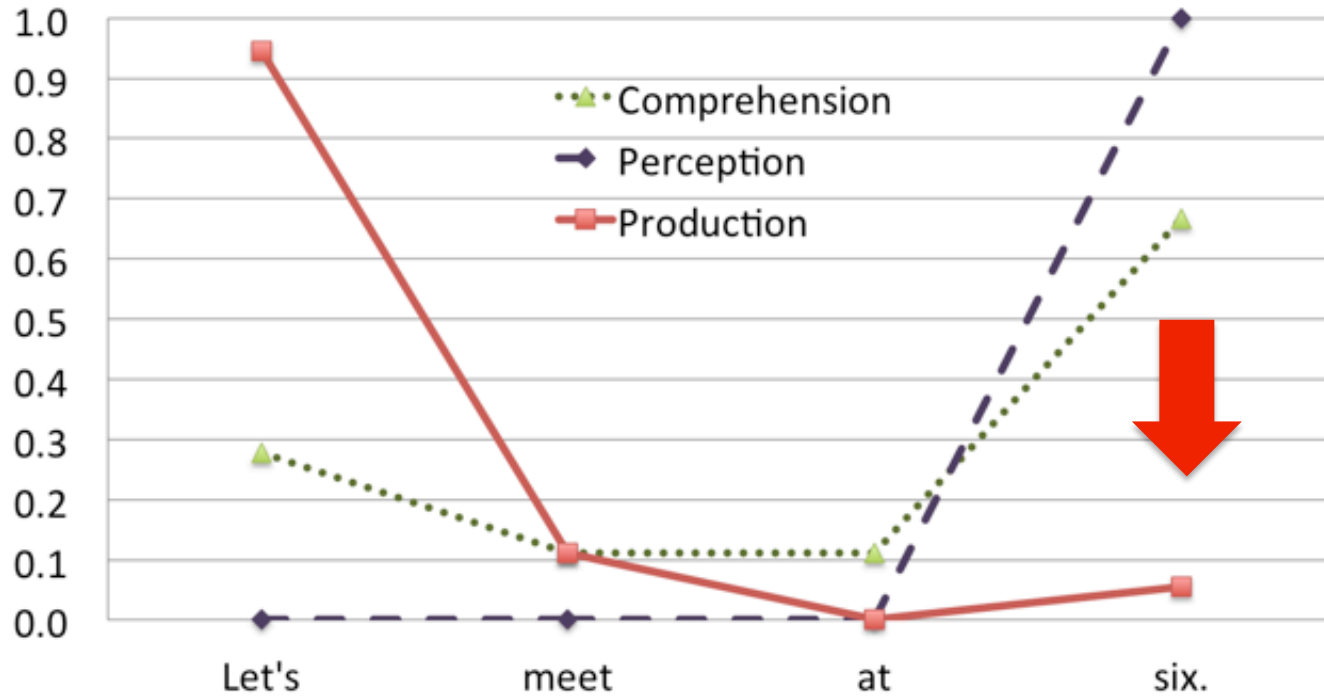
p-scores on
production vs. perception vs. comprehension
of Japanese speakers

P-Scores: Comprehension, Perception and Production



Focused sentence

P-Scores: Comprehension, Perception and Production



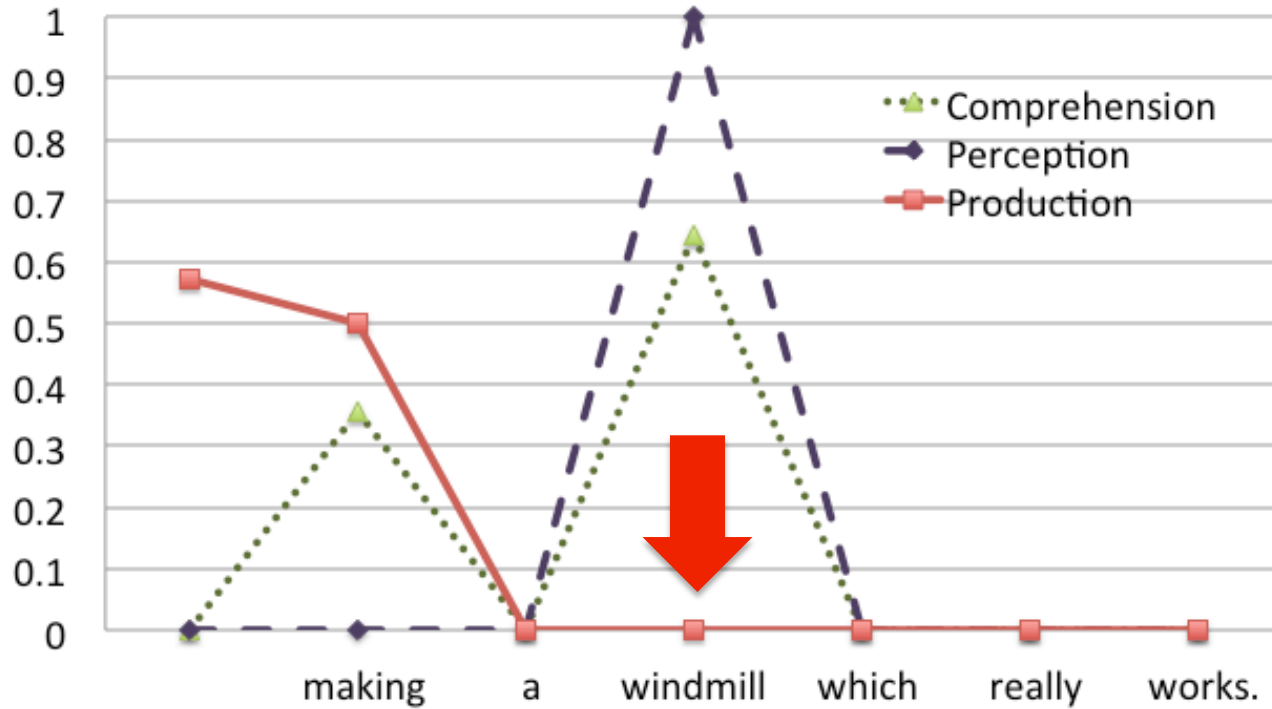
Focused sentence

P-Scores: Comprehension, Perception and Production



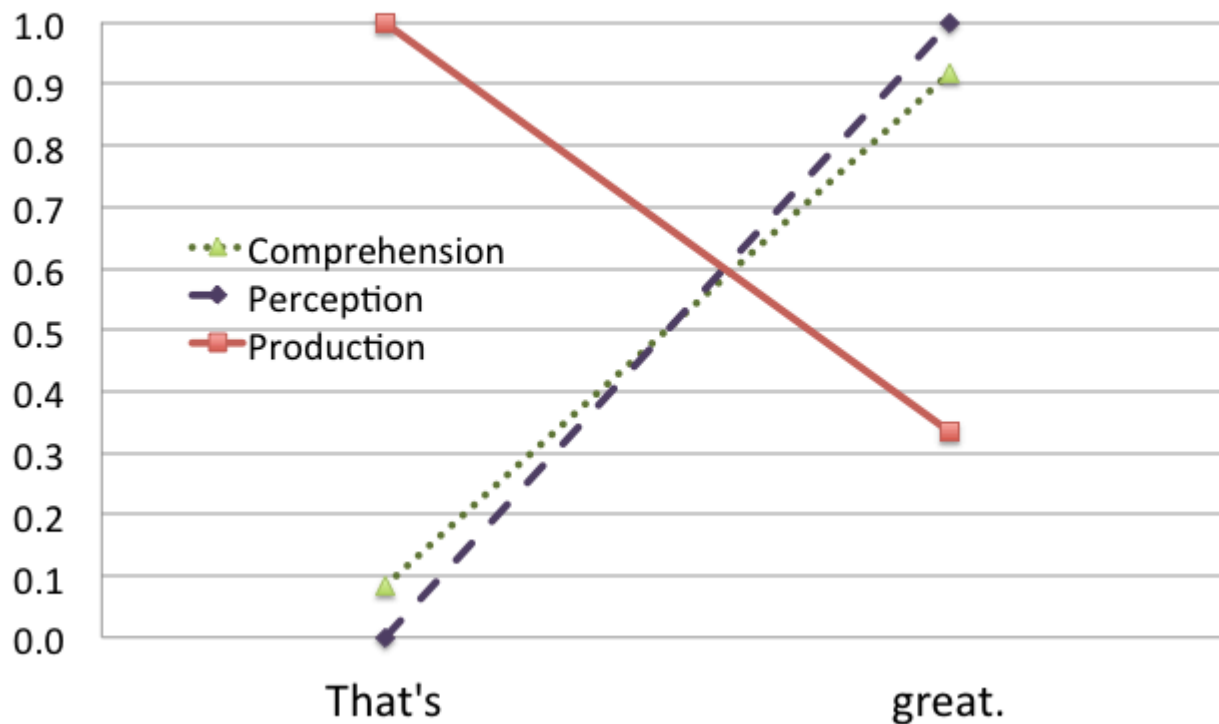
Focused sentence

P-Scores: Comprehension, Perception and Production



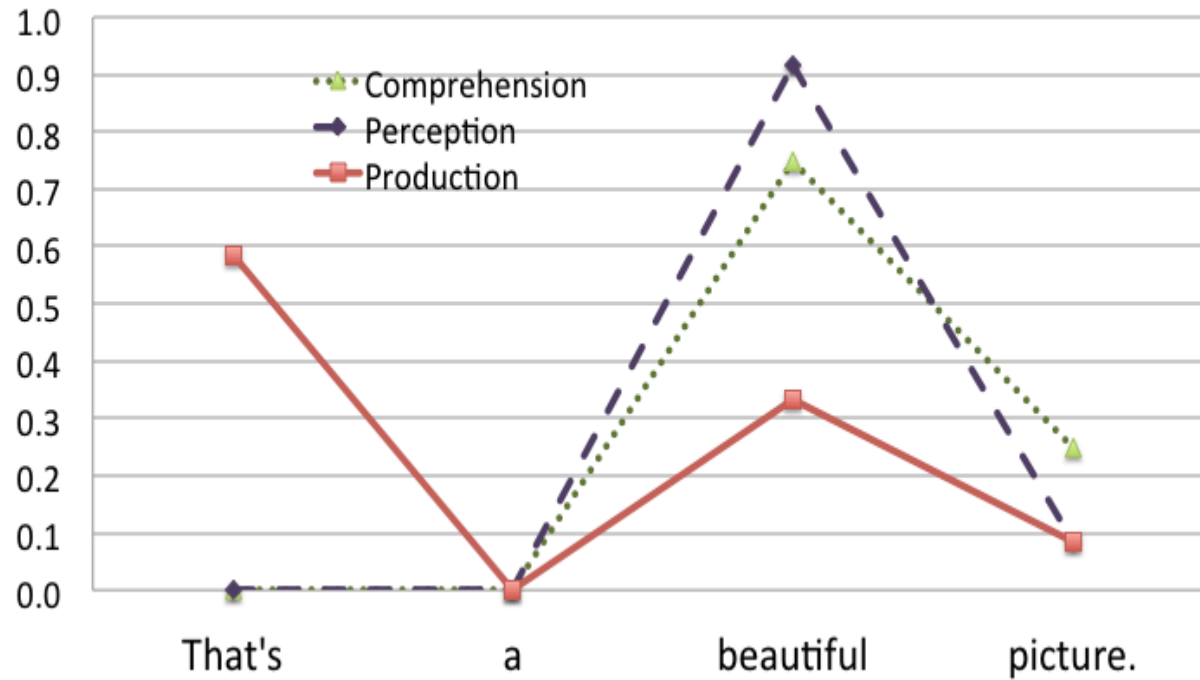
Focused sentence

P-Scores: Comprehension, Perception and Production



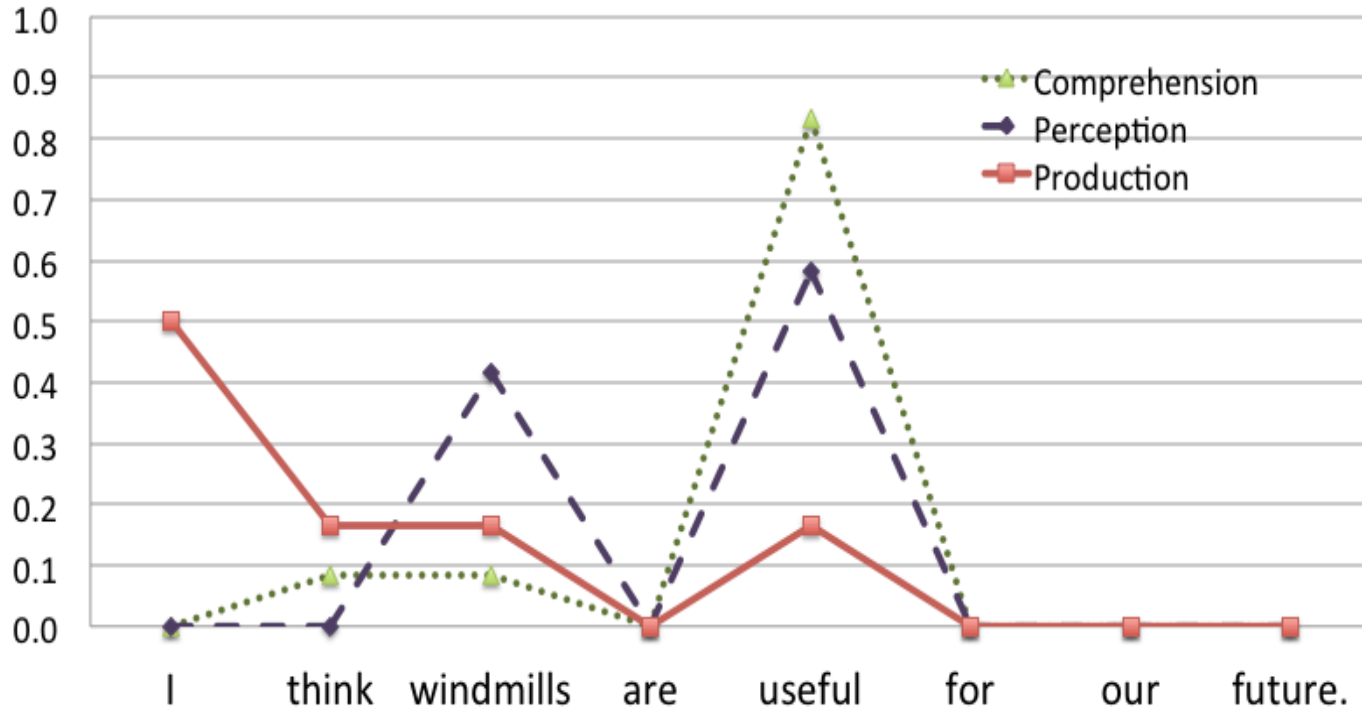
Declarative sentence

P-Scores: Comprehension, Perception and Production



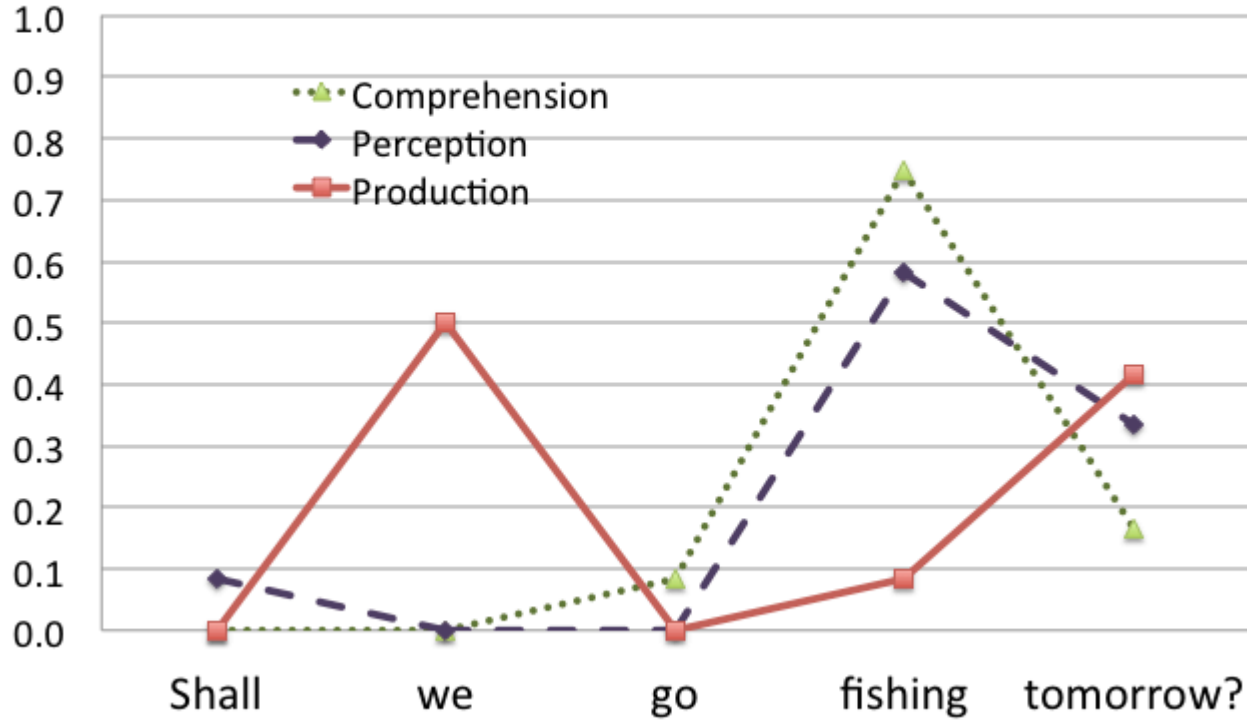
Declarative sentence

P-Scores: Comprehension, Perception and Production



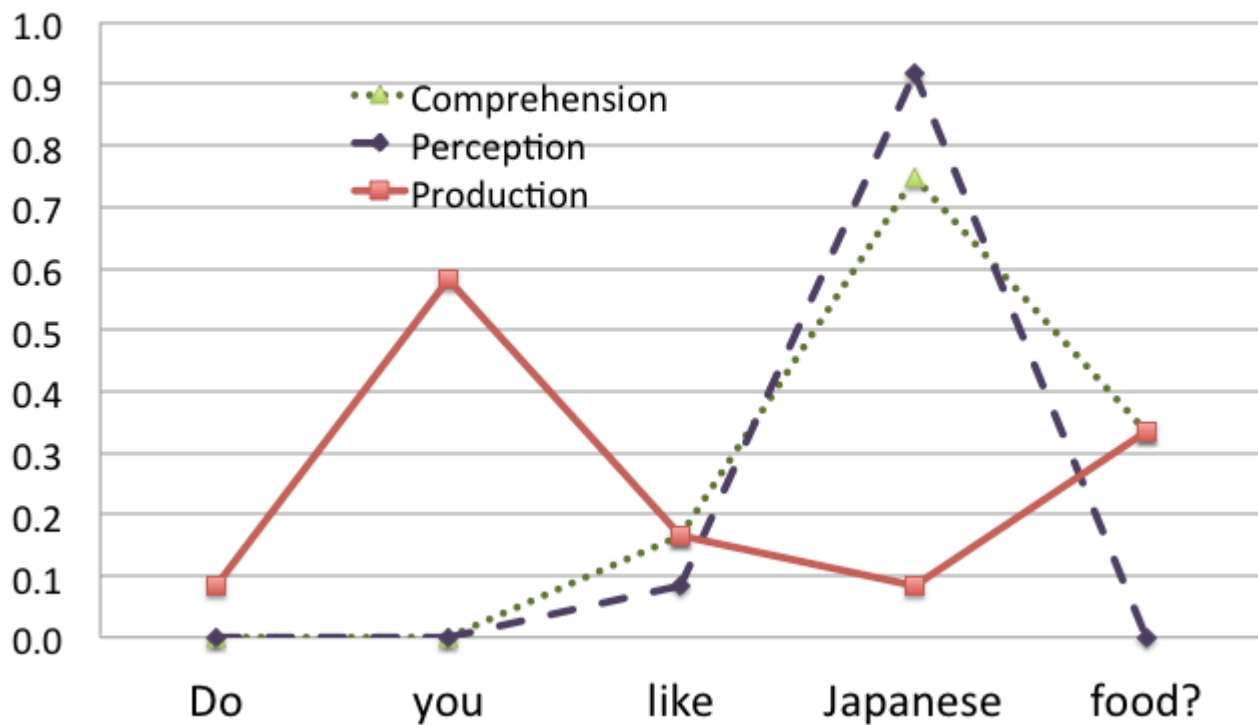
Declarative sentence

P-Scores: Comprehension, Perception and Production



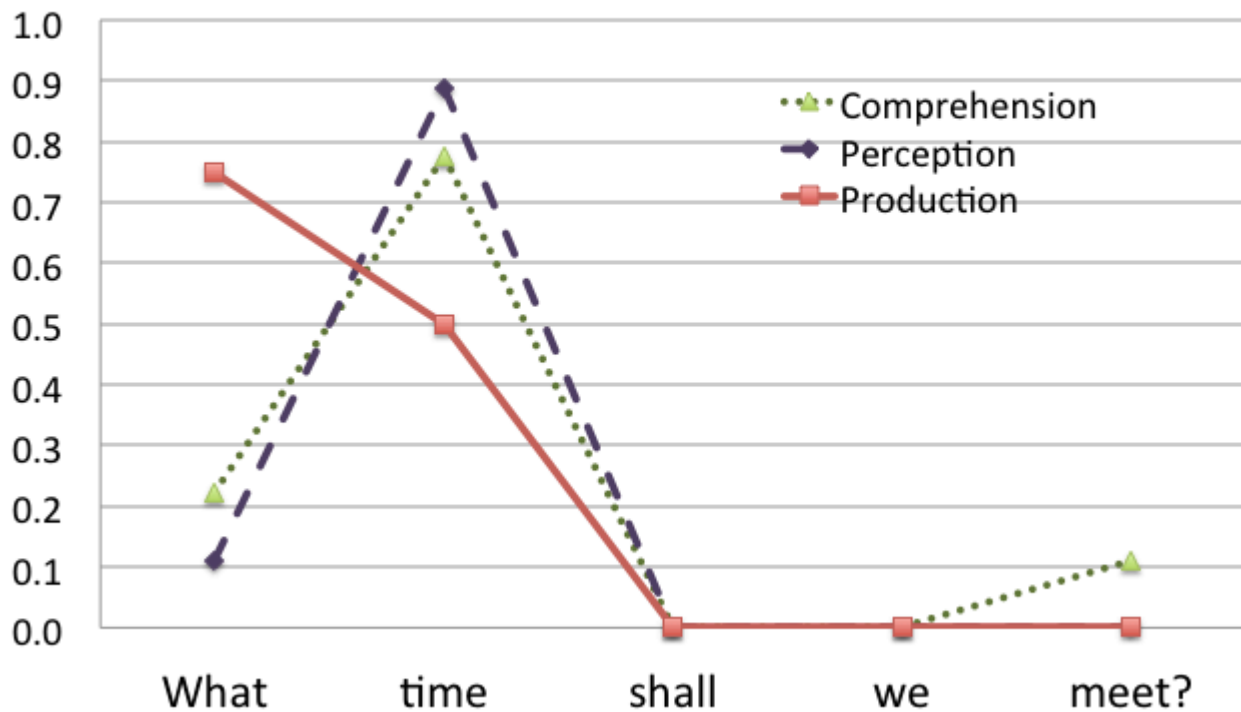
Question

P-Scores: Comprehension, Perception and Production



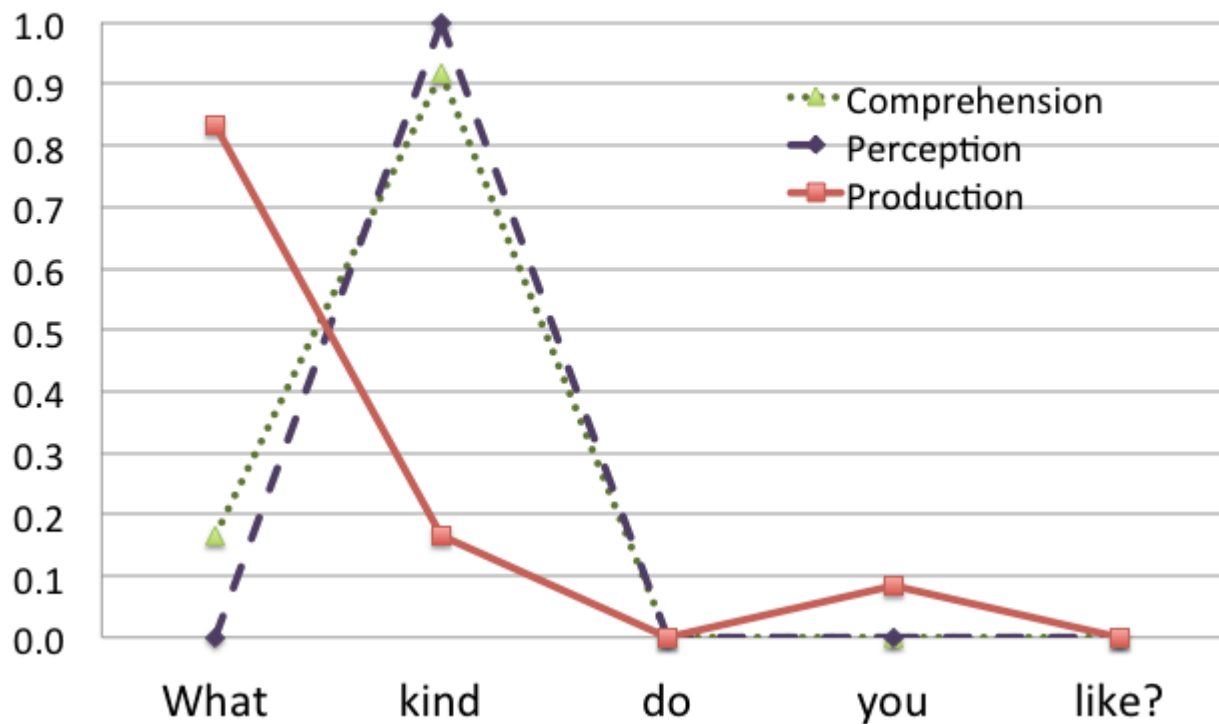
Question

P-Scores: Comprehension, Perception and Production



Wh-question

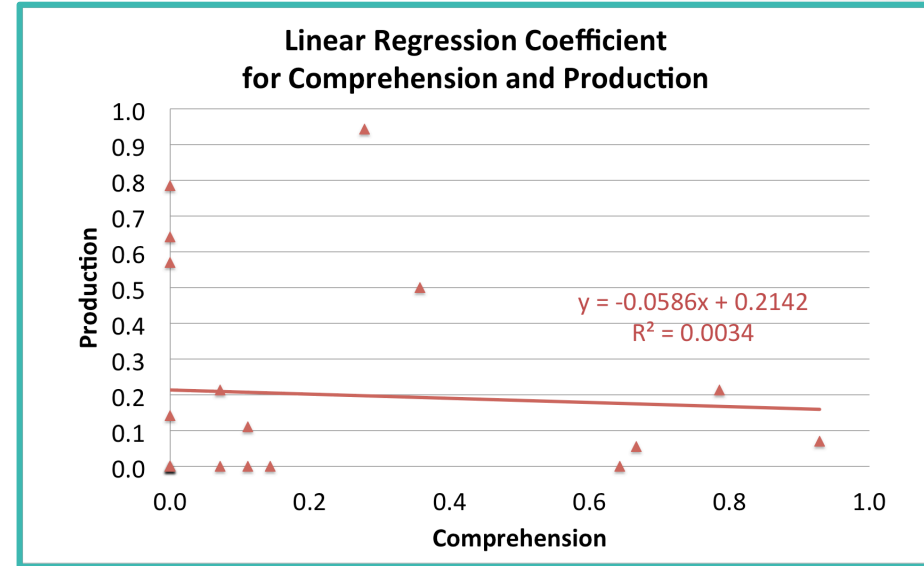
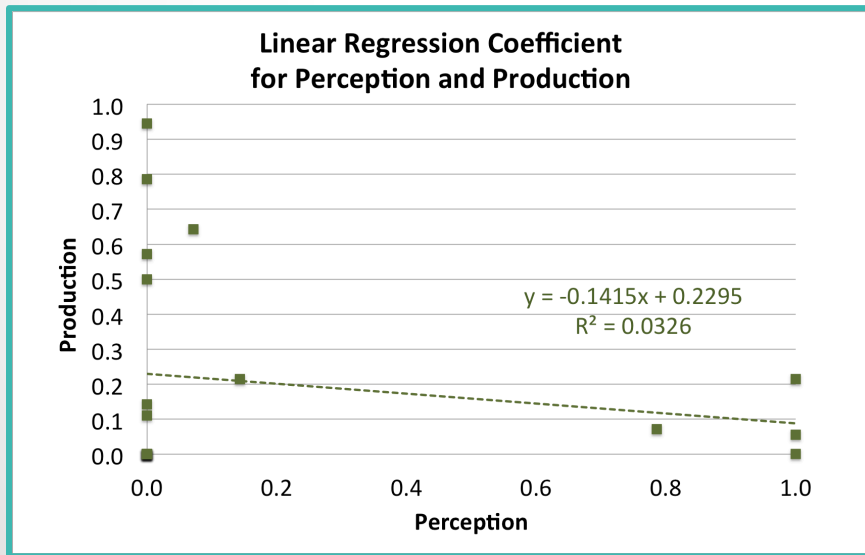
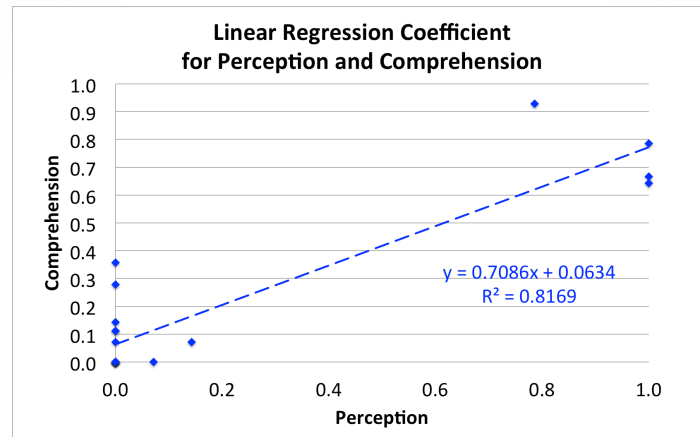
P-Scores: Comprehension, Perception and Production



Wh-question

RESULTS

Students who showed high scores in prosodic focus identification task and perception task did not necessarily show high performance in the production task (Yoshimura et al., 2014, Fujimori 2014).



Conclusion

1. Japanese speakers tend to have prominence toward the **left** edge, while English speakers tend to have a prominence more variably.
 2. Students who have **high** scores at the comprehension task and the perception task could perform the production task **poorly**.
- An improvement in production skills cannot be expected along with either the comprehension and perception improvements.
 - There may be a stage where the cognitive process is not smoothly mapped onto the motor skills, or the language-particular prosody may have been **fossilized** and is difficult to be modified.
 - Training for the production based on their feedback, along with explicit instructions, are necessary for Japanese students (Fujimori et al. 2015).

Acknowledgements

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