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# Subjects of the “A-movement” Constructions in Japanese EFL Learners’ Grammar

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## Purpose

To explore how subjects of the “A-movement” constructions are represented in the L2 grammar of Japanese EFL learners.

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## A-movement Constructions

- (1) a. John seems to be taller than his father. (raising)  
b. John is praised for his excellent performance. (passive)

## Syntactic Representations

- (2) a. John seems John to be taller than his father.  
          ↑ \_\_\_\_\_ ↓  
b. John is praised John for his excellent performance.  
          ↑ \_\_\_\_\_ ↓

**We will: (i) re-examine the results of our recent experiments on their comprehension of raising and passive constructions; (ii) obtain insights from Japanese-English comparative morphosyntax-semantic data.**

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## Question

Do Japanese EFL learners physically move the lower subject to the matrix subject position in the seem construction (1a) and move the logical object to the subject position in (1b)?



## Claim

Their L2 grammar erroneously permits the subject to be base-generated in the matrix [Spec, TP] position.



## ISSUE

How would this hypothesis be theoretically plausible?

# Previous Findings

Yoshimura & Nakayama (2010)

16 JSLEs (TOEIC Ave. 704.7, SD 151.5); 20 NSEs

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- (4) a. *It appears that our students danced all night to celebrate their graduation.*
- b. *\*This time seems that he followed my advice.*

## Finding I

- (i) Unlike the NSEs, the JEFs incorrectly accepted (4b) interpreting *this time* as the subject of *seem*.
- (ii) The JSLEs did not quite understand that a thematic role couldn't be assigned to the subject position by *seem*.
- ⇒ Similar results among Japanese college students (ave. TOEIC 704.7)

# Previous Findings

## YNFS (2016)

30 JHS students (TOEIC 215-625)

Novice-Low: ave. TOEIC 285 (215-330); Novice High: ave. TOEIC 443 (335-625)

(5) a. Hanako promised Susan to join the school tennis team. (SC)

- Q: *Dare-ga gakkoo-no tenisu chiimu-ni sankashimasu ka*  
'Who is going to join the school tennis team?'

A: 1. **Hanako** 2. Susan 3. both 4. I don't know

b. Jake appeared to Steve to have fun on his business trip. (RA)

- Q: *Dare-ga shucchoo-no-toki-ni tanoshisoodeshita-ka.*  
'Who seemed to be having fun on his business trip?'

A: 1. **Jake** 2. Steve 3. both 4. I don't know

Table 2 Mean correct response rates (%)

Group	SC (5a)	RA (5b)	Overall
Novice Low (n=15)	66.7 (SD:.475)	40.0 (.494)	62.8
Novice High (n=15)	75.0 (.436)	43.3 (.499)	69.4
Overall (n=30)	70.8	41.7	/

⇒ Raising constructions are difficult for Japanese HS students to acquire.

# Previous Findings

## Yoshimura, Nakayama, & Fujimori (2017)

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80 college students and 18 English NSs.

Low Group ( $n=28$ ) (Ave. TOEIC 443.36, SD=40.05)

High Group ( $n=25$ ) (Ave. TOEIC 732.92, SD=61)

- ⇒ The results confirmed that raising constructions are much more difficult than subject control structures for Japanese EFL learners to acquire.

### Finding II

- (i) Japanese EFL learners know that the EPP needs to be structurally met.
- (ii) Japanese EFL learners experience great difficulty in acquiring the raising construction, showing very slow development of the construction.
- (iii) Their difficulty seems to emerge partially due to the absence of Case-triggered movement in Japanese.

## Recent Findings

### Nakayama, Yoshimura, & Fujimori (2018, 2019)

46 college students and 10 English NSs

Middle Group=TOEIC Ave. 558.3; High Group=720.7

- Context-based acceptability rating (1~7 acceptable)
- 4 sentence types: 2 Passives (acceptable vs. unacceptable)

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  - 2 Raising (acceptable vs. unacceptable)
- 40 test sentences: 5 test sentences for each type and 20 fillers.

#### Raising

(6) a. John was a reporter and he thought that Virginia had a lot of money.

*Virginia seemed to be rich.*

b. Harry is Jane's secretary and he thought she looked sad after the business trip.

*\*After the business trip appeared to be feeling sad for Jane.*

#### Passives

(7) a. Ken cleaned Haruko's room.

*Haruko's room was cleaned by Ken.*

b. Tomoko flew to Paris and enjoyed drinking good wine during the flight.

*\*On the plane was served good wine.*

# Recent Findings

Nakayama, Yoshimura, & Fujimori (2018, 2019)

Table 3 Mean acceptability ratings by construction type

Group	Passives		Raising	
	Acceptable	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Unacceptable
Intermediate	6.08	4.35	5.36	4.34
High	5.75	4.53	5.75	4.9
NS	6.32	2.12	5.94	1.46

- ⇒ Acceptable sentences: no significant main nor interaction effects, except a sentence type difference within the Intermediate Group ( $F(1, 547)=7.298$   $p<.007$ ).
- ⇒ Unacceptable sentences: a significant main effect on Group ( $F(2, 523)=55.734$   $p<.000$ ), but **not on sentence type nor interaction**.
- ⇒ Significant Group differences in each sentence type: Passive  $F(2,523)=19.574$   $p<.000$ , Raising  $F(2,523)=37.834$   $p<.000$  → **the differences came from the learner groups vs. the NSEs**



# Recent Findings

Nakayama, Yoshimura, & Fujimori (2018, 2019)

Table 4 Mean differences between acceptable and unacceptable ratings

Group	Passives	Raising
	Acceptable-Unacceptable	Acceptable-Unacceptable
Intermediate	2.16	1.2
High	1.4	0.97
NS	4.2	4.36

⇒ A significant main effect on Group ( $F(2, 106)=22.860$   $p < .000$ ), but not on sentence type nor interaction. The differences came from the learner vs. the NSE groups.

## Findings III → 3 issues relevant to A-movement

- (i) It takes time for Japanese EFL learners to confidently reject unacceptable passive and raising sentences → **slow development of A-movement?**
- (ii) Japanese EFL learners erroneously permit PPs to be in the subject position → **negative L1 transfer?**
- (iii) It is confirmed that Japanese EFL learners know the EPP requirement, thereby feature-checking the PP subject in the [Spec, TP] position → **illicit A-movement?**

# Recent Findings

## Yoshimura, Nakayama, Fujimori, & Yusa (2019)

- 56 Japanese EFL learners participated; 11 removed; 45 divided into 3 groups.
- In the analysis, LOW (n=16, mean TOEIC scores 561 (530~575) ) and HIGH (n=16, 768 (705~885) ) compared. Middle group (n=13, 617 (580~700) not considered.
- A questionnaire with a TVJ task (40 test sentences in total) (20 fillers included)
- Condition=with or without gender cue (each 5 TRUE+5 FALSE)

### Type I

(8) a. Joe thinks that Hanako is smarter than any other student in their class.

*Hanako seems to Joe to be the smartest student in their class. (TRUE)*

b. Joe wondered why Sachiko drank too much wine at the party.

*Joe seems to Sachiko to have drunk too much wine at the party. (FALSE)*

### Type II

(9) a. The girl thinks that the boy likes his English teacher.

*The boy seems to the girl to like his English teacher. (TRUE)*

b. Mary thought that her brother worked hard on his assignment.

*Mary appeared to her brother to work hard on his assignment. (FALSE)*

# Recent Findings

Yoshimura, Nakayama, Fujimori, & Yusa (2019)

## Findings IV


- (i) The correct response rates among the learners - close to below or around chance level regardless of their English proficiency, sentence type, or TRUE/FALSE.
- (ii) Overall, the learners chose the experiencer phrase as the subject of the embedded infinitive clause more than 50% of the time, despite the pronominal cue provided in both the description and the test sentence.
- (iii) However, the HIGH group showed a better performance on Type II than on Type I. This suggests that Japanese EFL learners become sensitive to the gender-morphological distinctions as their English proficiency improves.

# Summary

Japanese EFL learners (i) understand the EPP requirement, (ii) encounter great difficulty with the raising construction, (iii) experience intervention effects, (iv) permit the subject PP, and (v) have unstable knowledge of passives.

(10) a.  $[_{TP1}[\text{The boy} [\text{seems to the girl} [_{TP2} \text{the boy} [\text{to like his English teacher}]]]]]$   
(Adult NS's representation of (9a))

b.  $*[_{TP1}[\text{The boy} [\text{seems} [_{TP2} \text{to the girl} [\text{to like his English teacher}]]]]]$   
(Japanese EFL learners' representation of (9a))

(11) a.  $[_{TP1}[\text{DP}_i [\text{seems to DP}_j [_{TP2} \text{DP}_i [\text{to VP}]]]]]$  ( $i \neq j$ ) (A-movement) (Adult L1)  
  
([copy & deletion] triggered for Case checking)

b.  $[_{TP1}[\text{DP}_i [\text{seems} [_{TP2} \text{to DP}_j [\text{to VP}]]]]]$  ( $i \neq j$ ) (Base-generation) (J EFL L2)  
(No movement triggered for Case checking)

## QUESTION

Empirically & theoretically: How plausible is the base-generation hypothesis (11b) for the Japanese EFL syntactic representation of the raising construction?

# Comparative Facts

## Basic Facts

[*Ga*]

► morphological *ga* assignment (Kuno 1973; Kuroda 1978,1988 )

(12) a. Nihon-ga jyoshi-ga heikin jyumyoo-ga nagai. (multiple *gas*)

‘Japanese women’s life span is long.’

b. Taroo-*ga* eigo-ga hanaseru. (*ga* for the object DP)

‘Taro can speak English.’

► Linear Case Marking System (Kuroda 1978)

c. Kono yuubinkyoku kara-ga kozutumi-o dashi yasui. (*ga* for PP)

‘It is easy to send a package from this post office.’

 No need to move the DP to the subject position in order for it to be nominative Case-marked in narrow syntax.

## Comparative Facts

[subject “raising” structure] (Takezawa 2015)

(13) a. Mary-ni John-ga shiawaseni omoeru/mieru  
Mary-DAT John-NOM happy seem/appear  
‘To Mary, John seems/appears to be happy.’

b. [<sub>TP</sub> Mary-ni [<sub>VP</sub> [<sub>TP</sub> John-ga shiawaseni] mieru T]] (like ECM)  
↑ nominative Case assigned ↓

 Subject-to-subject raising via A-movement not involved.

[scrambling as A-movement] (Kuroda 1988, Yoshimura 1992)

(14) a. Sushi-o John-ga tabeta.  
sushi-ACC John-NOM ate

b. [<sub>TP</sub> Sushi-o [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> John-ga sushi-o tabeta]]]

↑ copy & deletion ↓ (optional and not for Case assignment)

 Scrambling in Japanese=optional and not for Case assignment

# Discussion & Conclusion

- ◇ Empirically well-grounded arguments for the base-generation theory of the raising construction in Japanese EFL learners' L2 grammar.
- ◇ Compatible to some extent with Schwartz & Sprouse's (1996) Full Transfer/Full Access hypothesis.
- ◇ Reconfirm the important role of L1 in L2 acquisition (Schachter 1983, Gass 1988).

## Implications

We would further like to put the base-generation hypothesis forward as an alternative account of Japanese EFL learners' syntactic representation of passives in L2 English, as in (15b).

(15) a.  $[[_{\text{Spec}} \text{John}] [\text{is praised } \cancel{\text{John}} \text{ for his excellent performance}]]$ .

↑ copy & deletion ↓ (A-movement)

b.  $[[_{\text{Spec}} \text{John}] [\text{is praised for his excellent performance}]]$ .

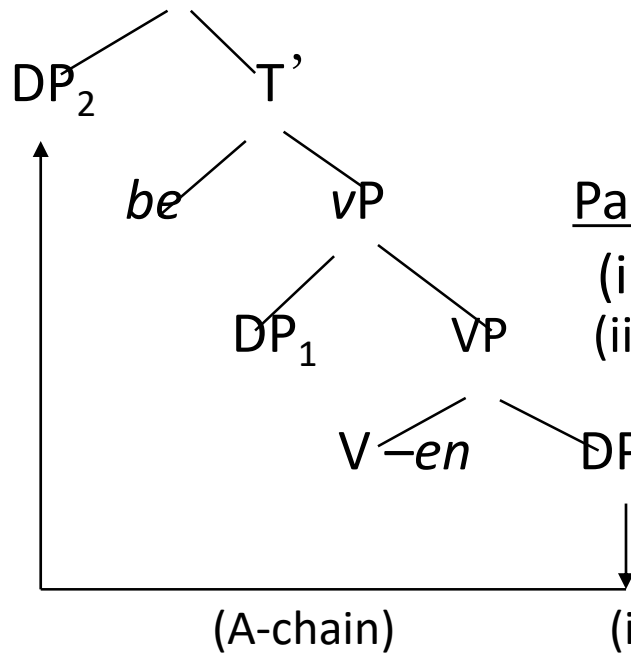
(base-generation)



# Implications

## Basic assumptions

(16) TP Form: *be -en* (auxiliary verb + past participle)



### Passivization in English

- (i) The passive morpheme *-en* is an argument
- (ii) When it is merged with V, *-en* is assigned Accusative Case (Chomsky 1981), and V absorbs the external  $\theta$ -role (Jaeggli 1986).

- (iii) The object DP<sub>2</sub> must move to the [Spec, TP] position.
  - (iv) The logical subject DP<sub>1</sub> may appear in the by phrase.
- (based on insights of Jaeggli 1986 and Baker et al. 1989)

# Implications

## 2 Types of Passives

- (16) a. Neko-ga nezumi-ni oikaker-are-ta. (direct)  
cat-NOM mouse-DAT chase-passive-past  
‘The cat was chased by the mouse.’
- b. Hanako-ga ame-ni fur-are-ta. (indirect)  
Hanako-NOM rain by fall-passive-past  
‘Hanako had rain fallen on her.’

- (17) a. [<sub>TP</sub> Neko<sub>i</sub>-ga [<sub>VP</sub> nezumi-ni [<sub>VP</sub> pro<sub>i</sub> oikaker] are-ta]]
- b. [<sub>TP</sub> Hanako-ga [<sub>VP</sub> ame-ni [<sub>VP</sub> fur] are-ta]]

⇒ In both direct and indirect passives, the subject DP is base-generated.

(based on Kitagawa & Kuroda’s (1991) proposal)

(contra Hoshi (1999), Fukuda 2006)

# Proposal

We postulate that Japanese EFL learners' grammar permits the subject DP to be base-generated in L2 English due to L1 transfer.

(18) a. [<sub>TP1</sub> DP<sub>i</sub> [seems [<sub>TP2</sub> to DP<sub>j</sub> [to VP]]]] (i≠j) (= (11b))

a'. [<sub>TP1</sub> DP<sub>i</sub> [seems to DP<sub>j</sub> [<sub>TP2</sub> PRO<sub>j</sub> to VP]]] (i=j) (= (11b))  
(an intervention effect)

b. [<sub>TP</sub> [<sub>Spec</sub> DP] [<sub>VP</sub> *be* [<sub>VP</sub> *V-en*] Tense]]]

Note: The passive structure of *be –en* is acquired early.

(Form-Before-Meaning Hypothesis)

(effects of explicit instruction?)

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