

The acquisition of Japanese as a second language. Ed. by Kazue Kanno. (Language acquisition and language disorders 20). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1999. (Pp 180).

In Ch 1 of this eclectic collection we learn from the editor that Japanese is studied as a second language “more commonly” than any other “language of Asia” (1), with study occurring extensively in Asia, North America, Europe, and South America, and that this is the first volume of papers about the acquisition of Japanese as a second language (JSL) ever published (2).

Ch 2 and 3 deal with the effects of input and interaction among learners. Shunji Inagaki and Michael H. Long note that negative feedback “abounds” in caretaker conversation with child learners (11). They report that in their study in which groups of low proficiency learners were given instruction using “modeling” and “recasts” (utterances repeated with corrective modification), only learners with prior knowledge of some of the language items showed improvement. The authors thus recognize that if the language items used in a study are inaccessible to the learner, results will be inconclusive.

Noriko Iwashita focuses on Swain’s (1985) “comprehensible output hypothesis ... that pressure to produce language may help learners to test hypotheses about the L2 and attend to form” (31). She conducts a study, non-native speakers to non-native speakers, designed to elicit comprehension checks and clarification requests in order to trigger “modified output” (31). She finds that more syntactic modifications are produced in two-way tasks than in one-way tasks (42), but that learners at low levels of proficiency often did not know how to remedy their utterances (43). The study suggests directions for further investigation of using “modified output” strategies in language learning.

Ch 4, 5, and 6 examine assessment of proficiency, for placement and to test learner knowledge of second language grammatical systems. Junko Ford-Niwa and Noriko Kobayashi introduce the Simple Performance- Oriented Test (SPOT), devised to assess Japanese proficiency efficiently in large numbers of foreign students at Japanese universities. SPOT requires the testee to listen to a recording of a native speaker pronouncing a series of noncontextualized sentences. At the same time, the testee reads them, filling in the one blank in each printed sentence (53 f). F-N and K report high correlation with other accepted, widely used tests (62), with high “process authenticity” (65).

Eric Kellerman, John van Ijzendoorn, and Hide Takashima attempt to address whether adult learners adhere to the empty category principle (ECP). They note that according to a study by Kanno (1996), Japanese native speakers and English speaking JSL learners both object to omission of Nom *ga* but accept omission of Acc *o*, inferring that the empty category principle seems available to both sets (73 f). They seek to replicate the study in two versions in the Netherlands, but fail to show that ECP guides learner responses. Makiko Hirakawa tests whether English and Chinese speaking learners of Japanese observe the distinction between unaccusativity and unergativity. She finds that neither English nor Chinese speaking JSL learners, nor, in numerous cases, Japanese controls, demonstrate the distinction (tested using case-drop) at surface structure, although they do show it at deep structure (107-9). The study is interesting also for its cross-linguistic comparisons.

Ch 7, 8, and 9 consider the acquisition of grammatical structures. Naoko Yoshinaga investigates the acquisition of “double wh-questions” among both Japanese speaking learners of English and English speaking learners of Japanese. The structure behaves differently in the two languages. She applied a questionnaire to each set of learners. The Japanese speakers reject all

the English “double wh-questions”; the English speakers, however, closely parallel native speaker controls in accepting all of the Japanese questions (126 f). Neither of the possible explanations posed for the disparity seem plausible. It seems more likely that the structures were accessible to the JSL learners, but not to the ESL learners.

William O’Grady considers acquisition of coordinate structures with gapping by English speaking learners of Japanese and Japanese speaking learners of English. English permits “rightward gapping,” e.g., ‘John reads *Time* and Susan Φ *Newsweek*’; Japanese permits “leftward gapping,” e.g., ‘John-wa *Time*-o Φ , Susan-wa *Newsweek*-o yon-da (142). O suggests the very useful generality that although word order typology does not predict the presence of gapping, it predicts that “leftward gapping” is impossible in “v-o languages,” and “rightward gapping” is impossible in “o-v languages” (143-4).

Kazue Kanno discusses gapping in English, Japanese, and Mandarin, and undertakes a study among JSL learners who are native speakers of English and of Mandarin (which permits no gapping) (160-1). She finds that among English-speaking learners, success in rejecting sentences with “forward gapping” relates to the amount of previous exposure to Japanese (164), yet Mandarin speaking subjects were more successful in rejecting “forward gapping” and in accepting “backward gapping” (168 f). K draws the conclusion that transfer (e. g., among English speakers) may hinder acquisition of a structure, and the absence of structures to transfer (e. g., among Mandarin speakers) may not (170).

A number of the papers collected here attempt to apply research in JSL acquisition to basic principles of Government Binding and Universal Grammar. The problems considered and the data presented elucidate issues in comparative grammar and offer insights into aspects of JSL research.

References

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- Swain, M. 1985. "Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development." In S. Gass and C. Madden (eds.), *Input in second language acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 235-253.

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