

Individual Paper Session 25
Processing and Syntax
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Acquisition of Japanese transitivity alternation by L1 English speakers

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This experimental study investigates the effect of L1 argument structure (AS) on L2 Japanese in transitivity alternation (TA) (e.g. *John broke the vase* vs. *The vase broke*). English and Japanese differ in the types of verb which enter into TA. The alternation is more permissive in L2 Japanese, i.e., Japanese allows a wider range of verbs to appear in TA which are either strictly non-alternating unaccusatives (e.g. *disappear*) or transitives (e.g. *cut*) in English. For instance Japanese equivalents of the examples below are grammatical. This situation suggests that Japanese grammar is wider than that of English regarding TA.

The string cut.

The Magician disappeared the rabbit.

However object-experience (OE) psych-verbs (e.g. *surprise*) are an exception since English OE psych-verb enters into alternation with its intransitive counterparts exhibiting the anticausative pattern (e.g. *frighten/ get frightened*) (Montrul 2001:153), while its semantic counterpart in Japanese is intransitive subject-experiencer verb which does not participate in TA; that is, Japanese grammar is narrower than that of English in this verb type. Therefore, a question arises as to whether L1 English learners transfer their L1 AS to L2 Japanese equivalent verbs whose AS actually differs from that of their L1 counterparts, but which apparently exhibit the same semantics.

Results of a picture acceptability judgement task, which manipulated the AS of the three types of Japanese verbs whose AS differ from their English counterparts, show that: (1) the emerging L2 AS faced severe competition from the transferred L1 AS, which leaves even advanced learners in the state of optionality in L2 AS; (2) however the results of the psychological-verbs which show a distinctive developmental pattern implies an effect of the UG property, as well as the L1 transfer of a morphological pattern (i.e. anticausative pattern of L1 OE-psych verb).