

**Individual Paper Session 25**  
**Processing and Syntax**  
**Thursday, July 6**  
**1:45-2:15pm**

**Processing mechanism underlying the production of English past tense inflection**

**Shigenori Wakabayashi**  
**Chuo University**  
[swkbys37@tamacc.chuo-u.ac.jp](mailto:swkbys37@tamacc.chuo-u.ac.jp)

**Ming-Wei, Lee**  
**London Metropolitan University**  
[ming-wei.lee@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:ming-wei.lee@londonmet.ac.uk)

**Benny Peng Ho, Lee**  
**National Institute of Education, Singapore**  
[phlee@nie.edu.sg](mailto:phlee@nie.edu.sg)

L2 learners have difficulty in producing relevant inflectional morphemes. To shed light on their processing mechanism, our study investigates L2 learners' processing of English past tense marking.

Our experiment involved 21 Japanese and 19 Singaporean university students; and 23 native speakers. In the test, the verbs were presented in the following context: "Every day I rob a bank. Just like every day, yesterday I ...." After the first sentence, the participants repeated the first sentence; and then a part of the second sentence was given, and they completed the sentence. The verbs were (1) 11 high-frequency irregular, (2) 12 low-frequency irregular, (3) 16 novel irregular, (4) 12 high-frequency regular, (5) 12 low-frequency regular, and (6) 12 novel regular verbs. The participants' familiarity of verb stems was also measured.

Our data indicate that (1) both L2 learners correctly irregularised high-frequency irregular verbs more than low-frequency irregular verbs, indicating storage of irregular forms in associative memory. (2) The Singaporean learners showed no difference in the regularisation of high- and low-frequency verbs, indicating that regular forms were computed via rules. (3) The Japanese learners produce regular past tense forms of high-frequency regular verbs more than those of low-frequency regular verbs, indicating that even regular forms were stored in associative memory. (4) But (3) does not mean that the Japanese learners do not have a rule-based system for producing regular forms, because they produced more regular forms than irregular or uninflected forms on novel verbs whether they were similar to real irregular verbs or not. (5) Compared to natives, both L2learners showed less use of irregular forms on novel verbs, indicating weaker productivity of their associative memory.

Overall, the more advanced Singaporean learners showed a fairly native-like past-tense processing system, and the less proficient Japanese learners showed a dual system in development.