

# Anchor Tense in Japanese Narrative

Midori INABA

*Department of Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language,  
Aichi University of Education, Kariya 448-8542, Japan*

## 1. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

A proficient narrative has consistency in anchoring favored tense. This consistency is considered one of the criteria for the development of child language in narrative discourse. Generally narrators can choose either past or present tense in recounting events. Another factor in evaluating proficient narrative is appropriate tense shifting<sup>1</sup> in narrative discourse.

The present study investigated the way Japanese children learn to use grammatical tense in narrative discourse. It centered on the developmental changes of temporal marking in Japanese narratives from two respects: a dominant tense and tense shifting. The research on dominant tense involved examining what tense Japanese children and adults favored for telling the story, and to what extent they are consistent in reliance on this form - either present or past - as an “anchor” for the narrative as a whole in a larger set of Japanese narratives. Tense shifting was discussed with the dominant tense, displaying how they switch past and present tense in accordance with the demands of a thematically organized and cohesive narrative.

Prior research conducted by Berman and Slobin (1994) demonstrated that younger children do not always manage to adhere to a single grammatical tense, but older children and adults maintained consistently a favored tense throughout the narration. The developmental change occurs from “perceptually-motivated” choice of tense/aspect forms to “narratively-motivated” choice. In the course of development, the child learns to use the expressive options of a particular native language to carry out narrative-discourse functions. That is to say, forms acquire broader and more discourse-motivated functions across different developmental phases, although the languages themselves differ in the extent to which a structural option is exploited by speakers.

Their study dealt with narratives in five different languages, that is English, German, Spanish, Turkey, and Hebrew, but it did not include research on the Japanese language. This study, then, attempted to examine whether the above-mentioned developmental features presented by Berman and Slobin (1994) were confirmed in regard to the development of Japanese as a first language, since the linguistic representations of tense/aspectual marking and the range of linguistic options available in Japanese are much different from those five languages.

The method of the study is in the following. Oral narratives elicited from Japanese children aged from 3- to 11-year olds and adults were used to fulfill the present study. The narrative texts were classified into three categories: dominant PAST, PRESENT, and MIXED tense (see 2.3), since in Japanese narratives either the present or the past can be the dominant or anchor form. The main concern of the study is to demonstrate the developmental changes of the favored anchor tense by Japanese children and adults. It also pays particular attention to universal features of development, and language-(Japanese-) specific features of linguistic development.

The first analysis presented the dominant tense favored by Japanese children and adults across ages, and characterizes the tense shifting at each age. The second analysis compared the results from Japanese children and adults with those of English-speaking children and adults in order to demonstrate the universal and the specific feature of Japanese, showing the similarities and differences between them. The findings of the study were discussed in crosslinguistic developmental perspective, examining the above-mentioned developmental processes of tense/aspect forms and functions in narrative discourse found by Berman and Slobin (1994).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Subjects: Japanese Children and Adults

Child subjects were all Japanese children who were acquiring Japanese as a first language. All of them were monolinguals born and raised in Japan, and their parents were all native speakers of Japanese. The children's ages ranged from 3 to 11. Adult subjects were Japanese native speakers. These subjects were divided into 10 groups according to their age. There were ten subjects in each group. The 3- to 5-year-olds attended preschool or kindergarten; the 6- to 11-year-olds were elementary school students. The age-range, mean age, background, and further information about the subjects can be found in Inaba (1999), which makes use of the same data base as this study.

Data from English children and adults were also analyzed in this study along with Japanese data. Transcripts elicited by the use of the same picture storybook as the present study are available for public use in the CHILDES (Child Language Data Exchange System; MacWhinney, 1991) archive.<sup>2</sup> The English narrative data used in the present study were English stories from English-speaking children, ages 3, 4, 5 and 9, and adults. Each group consisted of twelve subjects.<sup>3</sup>

### 2.2 Task: Frog Story

The narrative texts analyzed in this study are oral narratives derived from a picture storybook without verbal text, "Frog, Where Are You?" (Mayer, 1969). The author of this study gathered narratives from Japanese children and adults, following the same procedure and instructions as Berman and Slobin (1994).

*The basic procedure and instructions given when the data were collected were reproduced in Inaba (2001).* The book consists of twenty-four pictures, showing the story of a boy and his dog who go searching for their pet frog which has escaped. Either past or present tense can be considered normative, as a temporal anchor in this story. The past tense can be considered the most typical temporal setting for recounting the story, but narrators may choose present tense for the main thread of their narration to make their narrations more marked, like historic use of present tense (Casparis, 1975; Silva-Corvalan, 1983; Wolfson, 1982).

### 2.3 Definitions and Measurement

In Japanese, the past and present<sup>4</sup> tense are distinguished by the verbal morphemes *-ta*<sup>5</sup> and *-ru* respectively.<sup>6</sup> The "dominant tense" is defined as 75% or more of all the main clauses in the text being in either PAST or PRESENT tense. The coordinate clauses which carry tense interpretation are also included in scoring. The coordinate clauses which do not carry tense interpretation are excluded from the measurement.<sup>7</sup> The tense forms appeared in subordinate clauses, complementary clauses, and relative clauses are not included in this scoring, since the past and present tense forms in these clauses do not always undergo a temporal interpretation.<sup>8</sup> Texts which did not fit with a dominant PAST or PRESENT tense above were classified into MIXED tense usage.

In this study, the criteria for dominant tense was defined as the tense of at least 75% of the main clauses in a given text. One major purpose to adopt this criteria is to evaluate Japanese narratives by the same standards as Berman and Slobin (1994) used for analyzing the English narratives.

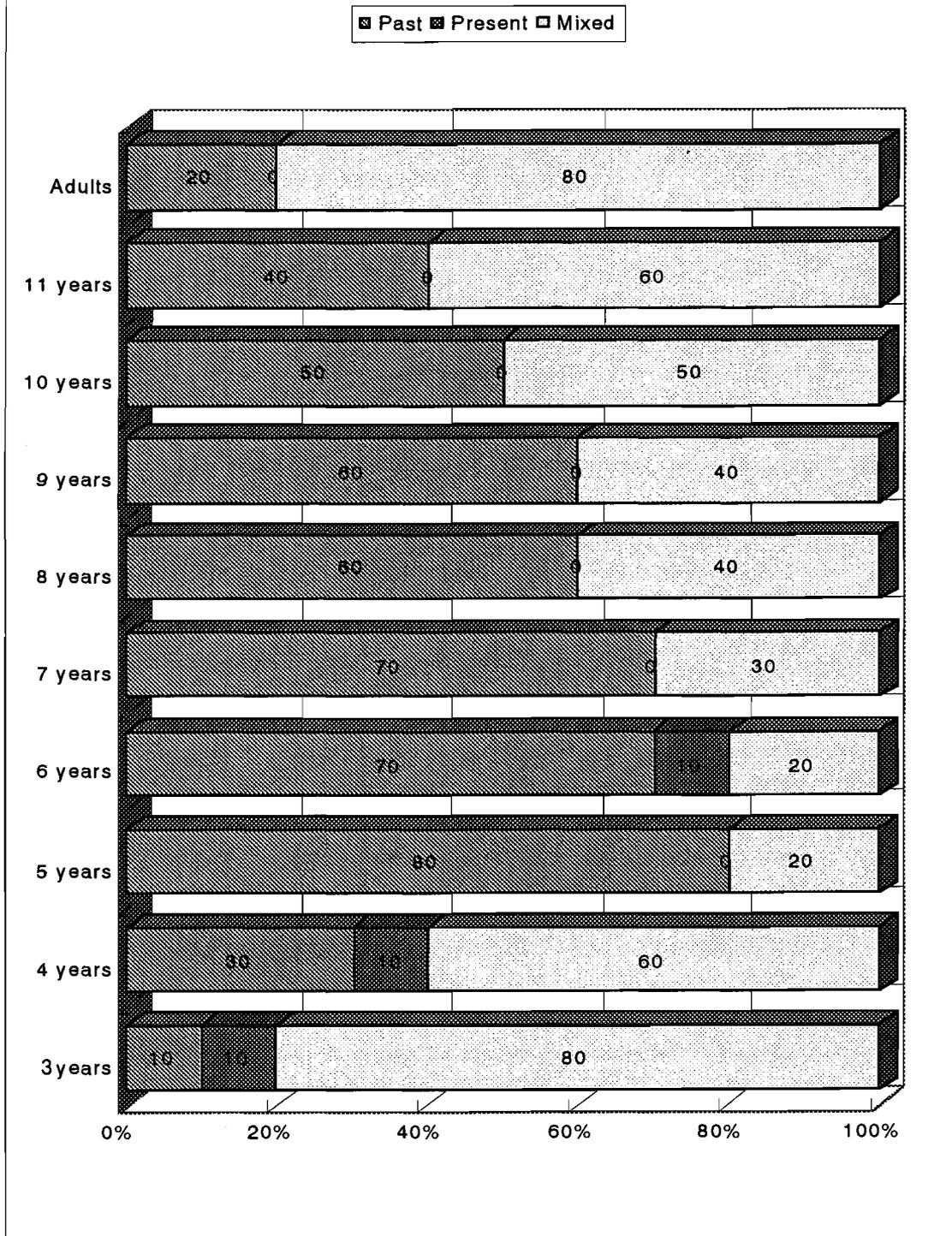
Statistical tests have not performed because the number of subjects in each group is small and their texts vary in length. Instead, qualitative analyses have performed trying to show the features of their tense-shifting in each age as well as quantitative analysis. Thus, this study introduces as many examples as possible.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1 Developmental Change of Dominant Tense across Ages

This section investigated the dominant tense favored by Japanese children and adults for telling the story. An oral text related from a picture story book allows the narrator to select either present or past as the tense in which to anchor the narrative in Japanese. Since findings in the literature (Fujiwara, 1976; Noji, 1973-77; Okubo, 1967; Okubo, 1984; Clancy, 1985; Shirai, 1998; Iwatate, 2001) showed that Japanese children learn to use

Figure 1: Percentage of Texts with Dominant PAST, PRESENT, or MIXED Tense Usage by Japanese Children and Adults



both inflections by age 3 without any error in form, it is assumed that the youngest children in this sample, aged 3 years, would have a command of both of these forms in formulating their narrations. Thus, the concern of the study is not with children's command of grammatical tense inflection; rather each narrative was analyzed for a "dominant tense," defined as 75% or more of all the main clauses in the text being in either present or past tense.

The first analysis concerned the dominant tense favored by Japanese children and adults. Figure 1 presents the percentages of Japanese texts anchored in the dominant PAST, PRESENT, and MIXED tense usage, by age.

The 3-year-olds did not show consistency in anchoring a single tense: 80% of them show mixed tense usage. They veer between present and past tense, showing the children's inability to maintain an anchor tense across a piece of narrative discourse. Shifts between past and present in the 3-year-old text often go back and forth from clause to clause or sentence to sentence. The shift is not based on narrative discourse nor syntactic consideration. They appear to have used picture-description strategy rather than using the tense forms with discourse organization functions, because the shift was found to be haphazard as is illustrated in the following example.

- Ex. 1      **PAST:** *Kaeru ga nigechatta.*  
             **PRESENT:** *Soushite asa ni natte kaeru ga inai.*  
             **PAST:** *Soushite inu neteru kede kaeru ga dokka ni icchatta.*  
             **PRESENT:** *Onii-chan wa saa mitsuketeru kaeru o.*  
             **PAST:** *Sabishikatta.*  
             **PAST:** *Inu ga shita ni ochichatta.*  
             **PAST:** *Soushite warechatta.*  
             **PRESENT:** *Soshite kaeru o mituketeru.*  
             **PRESENT:** *Soshite Wan-chan tonbo no su o totteru.*  
             **PAST:** *Koronzatta.* [J3e-3; 8]

Although 10% of the 3-year-olds consistently maintain present tense, this does not mean they structure their narratives in a thematically organized way. Rather, they use the present tense as a means of describing one picture after another, especially by the use of the present tense in the progressive aspect,<sup>9</sup> as illustrated below.

- Ex. 2      *Onii-chan kaeru-san no ... inu no ... kaeru miteru. Inu to neteru. Kaeru-san bin no naka kara dete ne, ouchi e kaeru n ja naai. Kaeru ga inu to Onii-chan ga mitara saa, bin no naka kara saa kaeru ga inai. De saa, oukii nagagutsu haite saa kaeru sagashi ni iku. Bin no naka kara inu ga saa haitteru. Inu ga acchi kara ochite onii-chan ga acchi kara sagashiteiru. Inu ga saa ochita. De watta bin. Onii-chan ga saa ootte yonderu, kareru no jin. Mitsubachi, hachi ga tondeiru. Inu to saa, inu wa kaideru to hachi no nioi ga suru. De saa, ana no naka miteru. Inu wa saa wanwan noboritai. De saa hachi ga wanwan ittete saa, nainka shiteru. Kusai naa tte itteru. De saa Inu ga saa noboritai, noboritai na itteru. ...*  
             'Onii-chan (the boy) is looking at ... frog's ... dog's ... the frog. (The boy is) sleeping with the dog. The frog goes out of the jar, and (it) seems to go back home. The frog ... when the dog and he boy looked (at the jar), the frog is not in the jar. And (the boy is) wearing big rain boots and goes out to look for the frog. From the jar ... the dog is in it. The dog fell off over there, and the boy is calling (the frog). And (the dog) broke the jar. The boy is calling the frog, xxx. ... The honeybees, bees are flying. The dog and ... the dog is smelling and (it) can smell bees. And (the dog is) looking inside the hole. The dog is barking, wants to climb. And the bees are buzzing and doing something. (The dog is) saying (it) stinks. And the dog wants to climb, is saying that he wants to climb. ...' [J3h-3; 10]

The recountings by 4-year-old also oscillate between present and past tense: 60% of them still showed mixed tense usage. However, the shift begins to decline at age 4 years, and they switch tense between longer chunks of text. Compare the span of tense shift by comparing this 4-year-old with the one by the 3-year-olds above.

- Ex. 3      **PAST:** *Kaeru-san ga naka ni haitteru.*  
**PAST:** *Soide nee kaeru-san ga nee neteru aidani dechatta soto ni.*  
**PAST:** *Soshite nee okitara nee kaeru ga inakute nee bikkurishita.*  
**PRESENT:** *Anonee nagagutsu no naka ni mo inaiite itteru.*  
**PRESENT:** *Wan-chan no naka ni mo inaitte itteru.*  
**PRESENT:** *Soto ni mo dete kangaeteru.*  
**PAST:** *Wan-chan ga nee konomama de dechatta.*  
**PAST:** *Soide nee bin wacchatta.*  
**PAST:** *Anonee hachinosu ga nee burasagatteita.*  
**PRESENT:** *Ana no naka mitetara nee Wan-chan ga nee hachinosu nee tonde nee tabeyoutoshiteiru.*  
**PRESENT:** *Anonee Wan-chan ga nee ki ni noboroutoshitenee hachinosu o tabeyoutoshiteiru. [J4a-4; 0]*

The 5-year-olds showed a strong preference for dominant past tense: 80% of them mainly used past tense form. They maintained the same tense throughout their narration. It suggests that they gradually came to be able to recount event in narrative mode, since past tense is considered the most typical temporal setting for the recounting of chronologically sequential events in narrative (Berman and Slobin, 1994). It also indicates the development of the ability to relate the events depicted in the pictures to a fictive world that is not concurrent with the time of speaking. However, their consistent use of past tense forms still remains within a main verb of simple sentences. In the narrative below, the 5-year-old consistently maintained past tense.

- Ex. 4      *Shin-chan to Wan-chan wa kaeru o miteimashita. Soide Shin-chan to Wan-chan wa nemucchatte kaeru ga kossori nigete ikimashita. Soide Shin-chan to Wan-chan wa okite kaeru o mitara kaeru wa imasendeshita. Soide Shin-chan wa nagagutsu no naka o sagashitemo imasendeshita. Inu wa kabin ni tsukkonde kaeru o sagashite imashita. Inu wa kabin ni tsukkondamama soto o miteimashita. Shin-chan wa Kaeru-kun o yondeimashita. Soide inu wa ochiteshimaimashita. ...*  
 ‘Shin-chan (the boy) and Wan-chan (the doggy) were looking at the frog. And the boy and the doggy went sleep, and the frog furtively went away. And the boy and the doggy woke up to find the frog was not there. And the boy looked in the rain boots, but did not find it. The dog plunged into the jar, and was looking for the frog. The dog looked outside, plunging into the jar. The boy was calling the frog. And the dog fell off. ...’ [J5b-5; 0]

The 9-year-olds also favor a past-tense anchor, as 60% of them chose the past tense as dominant. Although the proportion was a little lower than the 5-year-olds’, their command of past tense form is more developed than the 5-year-olds’. They used the past tense forms for broader function. The past tense forms frequently occurred in coordinate or subordinate clauses to serve as a backgrounding function of events, as excerpted in Ex. 5. This coincides with the development of their narrative discourse competence, presented by Inaba (1999, 2001 and 2002).

- Ex. 5      ... *Asa megasametemiru to bin no naka ni Kaeru-kun ga inakatta node shinpaisoo ni miteimashita. Shin-kun wa heya no naka o ippai sagashita kedo Kaeru-kun wa mitsukarimasendeshita. Kuiru mo sagashita kedo imasendeshita. Shin-kun to Kuiru wa doa kara kao o dashite sagashita kedo imasendeshita. Kuiru ga doa kara okkochiteshimatta node Shin-kun wa doa kara orite tsukamaemashita. Shin-ku wa ie kara dete Kuiru to Shin-kun wa koe o dashite Kaeru-*

*kun no namae o yondeimashita. Mori ga **atta node** mori no mukou ni iruka naa to omotte mori ni haitteikimashita. ...*

'... Since the boy woke up to find no frog in the jar, (he) worriedly looked (into the jar). Though the boy looked around the room, he did not find the frog. Kuiru (the dog) also tried to find (it), but he could not find it. Although the boy and the dog looked for (the frog) outside the window, (the frog) was not there. Since the dog fell off the window, the boy went down from the window, and held him. The boy went out of the house, and the dog and boy called the frog's name with a loud voice. Since they saw a forest, they went into the woods, wondering whether the frog was there. ...' [J9b-9; 1]

The percentages for the dominant past tense, however, declined at higher ages; 40% of the 11-year-olds and only 20% of the adults used an anchoring past tense. Instead, mixed tense usage began to increase at age of 7 (30%) and reached 60% at age 11. The increase of the mixed tense usage indicates that they shift tense forms more frequently in their narration. The way they shift tense forms is more global and narrative-discourse oriented. They switch tenses to serve narrative discourse functions. In the example below, the narrator often switches to present tense, often in present progressive aspect form (*-teiru*), to describe the vividness of the story or to express the internal aspect of the protagonist. The following texts exemplify this.

Ex. 6 *Aru yo Shin-kun to Pero ga ippiki no kaeru o bin no naka ni irete jūto miteimashita. Sono yo Shin-kun to Pero ga isshoni neteiru toki Kaeru-kun wa bin no naka kara nukedashite soto e itteshimaimashita. Asa okitemiru to Shin-kun to Pero wa Kaeru-kun ga inai no o mite kyorokoro to **sagashiteimasu**. Koko ni wa **iru kana**. Kocchi ni wa iru kana to iroiro **sagashiteimasu**. Shin-kun wa isshoukenmei **sagashiteimasu**. Pero mo bin no naka ni inai ka to isshoukenmei **sagashiteimasu**. Pero wa bin o kuwaetamama ni wa o **miteimasu**. Shin-kun wa niwa o niwa ni wa zettai iru to omoi yooku sagashiteimashita. Shin-kun ga shita o mita toki Pero ga huutto niwa ni ochiteshimaimashita. Kacchaan. Pero ga kubi o bin no naka ni tsukkondamama bin wa wareteshimai Shin-kun wa **kankan desu**. Shin-kun to Pero wa mori no hou ni iru no ka to omotte mori nohou e sagashiniikimashita. ...*

'One night, Shin-kun (a boy) and Pero (a dog) put one frog in a jar, and were staring at it. That evening, while the boy and the dog were sleeping together, Kaeru-kun (the frog) crawled out of the jar and went away. When they wake up in the morning, the boy and the dog find out that the frog has gone, and they are looking around. Can I find it here? Can I find it there (this way)? He is looking for it everywhere. The boy is looking for it urgently. The dog is also looking for it urgently, trying to find it in the jar. The dog is looking at the garden with the jar in his mouth. The boy was looking for it in the garden, convinced that the frog was there. When the boy looked down, the dog fell down to the garden. Crash! The dog has stuck his head in the jar, and the jar has broken, and the boy is getting angry. The boy and the dog wondered if the frog was in the woods, and they went out for the woods. ...' [J11b-11; 1]

Most of the adults (80%) choose the mixed tense usage, indicating that mixed tense usage seems to be the most common way to tell this story in Japanese, under the criteria of the present study. It should be noted here that the mixed tense usage does not mean that Japanese narrative texts are not well-organized. The contrast of tense/aspect forms is used to serve narrative discourse functions, rather than reflecting the visible event characteristics of individual pictures. The following example from an adult narrator includes frequent tense shifting. She switches to present tense in the negative expression (*-masen*) to emphasize the contrast, as well as in progressive forms (*-teimasu*) and in the modal expression to describe internal aspect of the protagonist.

Ex. 7 *Otokonoko wa Kaeru-kun o bin no naka ni irete kaou to **shiteimasu**. Mikazuki no yoru otokonoko wa gussuri nemurimashita. Sono aida ni Kaeru-kun wa nigeteshimaimashita. Asa otokonoko wa*

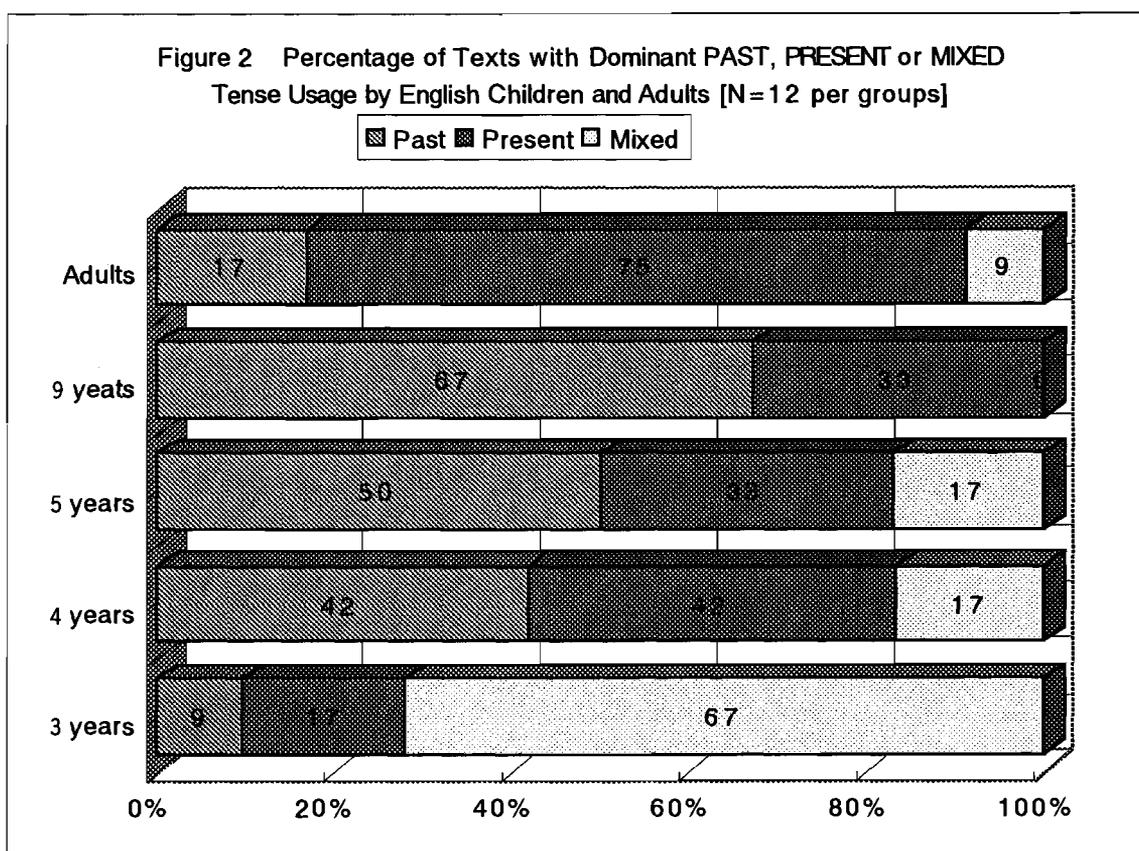
*me o samasu to bin no naka ni Kaeru-kun wa imasen. Doko e itteshimattandarou. Otokonoko wa kutsu no naka inu wa bin no naka sokorajyu o sagashiteimasu. Mado kara "Kaeu-kun doko e itta no" to yobikaketeimasu. Inu wa bin no naka ni atama o ireteshimai nakanaka nukemasen. Sorede bin o toutou watteshimaimashita. Otokonoko wa okotteimasu. ...*

'The boy tries to keep Kaeru-kun (a frog), putting it into the jar. In the night, under a crescent moon, the boy slept soundly. Meanwhile, the frog ran away. When the boy wakes up, the frog is not there. Where has he gone? The boy (is looking) in the boots, the dog (is looking) in the jar, they are looking around everywhere. (They) are calling out from the window, "Frog, where are you?" The dog has stuck his head in the jar, and he cannot get out. Then he finally broke the jar. The boy is angry. ...' [J20b]

In summary, the youngest children did not show consistency in anchoring a single tense. They shifted between present and past tense without narrative discourse or syntactic consideration. By age 5, a majority of the children became able to maintain single tense. They showed a strong preference for the dominant past tense. The 9-year-olds also chose the past tense as dominant, using tense forms in more mature functions of discourse organization. This finding supports the argument that past tense in Japanese, as in other languages, is the unmarked or most typical temporal setting for the recounting of chronologically sequential events in narrative. However, the more mature narrative of oldest children and adults demonstrated the mixed tense usage. That is, they frequently shifted between present and past tense forms according to the demands of a thematically organized and cohesive narrative. In other words, the most vivid and more mature narration for this story in Japanese allows frequent tense shifts.

### 3.2 The Comparison of Japanese and English Development

Japanese children manifested similar developmental trends to English-speaking children, although the most favored tense in each language is different. The analysis in this section compared the results from the current study with those from English-speaking children and adults. Figure 2 shows the dominant tense



favored by English children and adults. The figures show the percentages of the English texts with dominant PAST, PRESENT, or MIXED tense usage. The data were adapted from Berman and Slobin (1994, p.132), and original figures were converted into the percentages (by the author) and reproduced in Figure 2.

The younger narrators do not always manage to adhere to a single grammatical tense. 17% of the 3-year-olds favored the present tense dominant. However, the way they use this form is mostly applying picture-description strategy, rather than narrative discourse function. Two-thirds (67%) of English-speaking children at age 3 were classified into mixed tense usage. They shift back and forth between present and past tense, failing to select either present or past tense for temporal anchoring. A similar tendency was observed among Japanese younger children. The following 3-year-old text adopted from Berman and Slobin (1994, p.132) exemplifies the back-and-forth shifting of English-speaking children between present and past.

- Ex. 8      **PRESENT:** *Look at this frog, look when he's sleeping, and ... his frog getting out!*  
**TRANSITION:** *Look what happened to the guy!*  
**PAST:** *Oh no! He licked on his face, and he fell out the window.*  
**PRESENT:** *Bee - er - beehive. He's standing on two toes.*  
**PAST:** *He broke it. A owl flew out of here.*  
**PRESENT:** *And he's running away. Look at the dog, he's sad.*  
**PAST:** *A reindeer - he threw them down.*  
**TRANSITION:** *Now look what happened to the dog. Frogs! A whole family of frogs! [Investigator asks: "What about the boy?"]*  
**PRESENT:** *He doesn't have a family. [E3a-3; 1]*

The older English-speaking children provided a consistent temporal thread to the texts by anchoring them in either past or present tense. Half of the 5-year-olds favored the use of the past tense as dominant, and 33% of them, the present. These figures indicate the establishment of anchor tense. Japanese children at this age also showed the establishment of anchor tense.

The 9-year-olds strongly favored a past-tense anchor. Japanese children at this age also demonstrated a similar trend. This correlation demonstrates the development of narrative discourse competence, since the past tense anchor is the unmarked, common way to tell a story.

75% of English-speaking adults favored present tense as dominant. The high percentage suggests that the present-tense anchor is one of the most vivid ways to recount this story in English. The picture-based nature of the narrative makes a present-tense perspective fully appropriate, since the events depicted in the book can be viewed as ongoing, and narrators can choose to treat the pictures as depicting a currently unfolding sequence of events (Berman and Slobin 1994; p.131). The following text adopted from an English-speaking adult is an example of anchoring the present tense in narration.

- Ex. 9      *The little boy and his dog are looking at the frog, he has in the jar. It's happy, and he goes to sleep, and the frog, he's climbing out of the jar. They wake up the next morning, and he's looking for his frog, and he's not there, and he's really upset, looks like he's about to cry, and then he looks everywhere, looks in his boots. The dog looks in the jar, calls out the window, and they look everywhere, and um looks like he's getting mad at his dog, looks like he's mad at his dog. Um and they go call in the woods, and the dog is looking in a beehive for it. [E20a]*

It should be noted here that Japanese and English adults manifest a different distribution of favored tense. The older English-speaking children and adults anchor with either past or present tense. The rates of mixed tense usage among English-speaking children and adults declined with age. This decline suggests that the mixed tense usage is one of the characteristics of juvenile narrative in English. Japanese native speakers, on the other hand, most favor mixed tense usage. The rates of mixed tense usage of Japanese children once declined with age, and then again increased among the school-age children. The majority of the oldest-child group (11-year-olds), and adults favored mixed-tense usage, as shown in Figure 1 in the previous section.

In summary, Japanese and English narrators showed similarity in the early and intermediate stages of development. In the early stage of development, they mixed past and present tense forms randomly in the texts. In the intermediate stage, they most frequently used past tense as a temporal thread of the story. Quite a difference was observed in the advanced stage. Japanese children favored mixed tense usage, shifting past and present tense frequently in the narrative discourse function. English children, in contrast, anchor either present or past tense as a temporal thread.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the current study indicate that Japanese children follow similar developmental sequences to those presented by Berman and Slobin (1994). That is, developmental change occurs from perceptually-motivated choice of tense/aspect forms to narratively-motivated choice. The young children used past and present tense forms without consistency, switching back and forth. They used present tense as a picture description function, reflecting the visibly evident characteristics of individual pictures. Then, with the development of structural knowledge, they tried to keep a consistent temporal thread to the story. In the case of Japanese and English, the older children commonly used past tense as a temporal thread.

In crosslinguistic terms, the previous study by Berman and Slobin (1994) revealed that a dominant narrative tense tends to be established at 4 years of age (English, Spanish, Hebrew) and by age 5 in German and Turkish. Past tense is favored by most English and Hebrew 9-year-olds, and present tense by most German, Spanish, and Turkish 9-year-olds. By age 5, more than half of the children could adhere to a dominant tense, and make discourse-appropriate use of tense shifts. Many of Japanese children not excerpted established an anchor tense around these ages.

After the establishment of an anchor tense, the distribution of the favored tense moved toward an adult's (native-like) distribution. That is, the native speakers' most favored way increasingly predominated. In the case of Japanese, the mixed tense usage was the most favored way to recount the story. This finding is considered to be one of the language-specific features presented in this study. From a crosslinguistic perspective, either past or present is dominant in mature narratives in the above five languages. In English, for example, the present is the most favored tense form and mixed tense usage is rarely found.

Narrative functions of tense and aspect cannot be considered without taking into account the range of linguistic options available in each language, since linguistic representations of tense/aspectual marking is diverse across languages. The present-tense narratives of most English-speaking adults alternate quite naturally between a simple-present backbone plotline and occasionally shift to perfect for relative tense or to progressive for a contrastive aspect. English speakers can use the present perfect for expressing anteriority although its "present relevance" function has been largely taken over by the simple past in American English, the native language of their narrators (Berman and Slobin, 1994). In Japanese the grammatical distinction for imperfective/perfective aspect is marked by *-ru* and *-ta* form (Takahashi, 1985; Kudo, 1989). Morphologically, the former expresses imperfective meaning, and the latter expresses perfective meaning. The present perfect is a marked *-ta* form.<sup>10</sup> The interpretation of the *-ta* form relies on context (Kudo, 1995).

In the present analyses, however, the *-ta* form appeared in the main clauses classified as the PAST. That is, the *-ta* forms used in the sense of present perfect are not distinguishable from the past tense in the scoring. The present perfect form was classified into the PRESENT tense in English. This grammatical difference could be a factor contributing to the high proportion of mixed tense usage in Japanese. Since the main purpose of the present study is dominant tense (anchor tense), the semantic distinction between present perfect and past tense was not fully taken into account in the present analysis, although it is important. Further analyses are necessary to demonstrate how the subjects shift tense in narrative discourse function, and how they use tense/aspect forms to serve narrative functions.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the way Japanese children learn to use grammatical tense in narrative discourse,

centering on the anchor tense in narrative. The findings of the study are consistent with prior research by Berman and Slobin (1994) suggesting that a developmental change occurs from the perceptually-motivated choice of tense/aspect forms to a narratively-motivated choice. That is, in the early stage of development, the children do not keep a consistent temporal thread in their stories. They use tense forms with a picture-description strategy, rather than in story-telling mode. In Japanese, the present form is often used for the immediate present (describing an on-going event visible in the pictures) and the past tense, the perfective function (describing the perfective aspect of the action visible in the picture). In accordance with the development of narrative-organization ability, the children become able to maintain a consistent temporal thread, in which Japanese children most commonly used the past tense.

Once an anchor tense was established, the narrators began to make their narrative more vivid and effective. One of linguistic options available for Japanese narrators is to alternate tenses to serve a narrative discourse function, since the past and present forms in Japanese also make the perfect/imperfect distinction. Most of the mature renderings by Japanese native speakers manifested frequent tense shifts, classified into mixed tense usage. This mixed usage is considered one of the specific (distinctive) features for Japanese narratives discovered in the present study, contrasting to the other five languages which manifested either past or present as a dominant tense.

In a developmental perspective, older Japanese children began to show frequent tense shifts after an anchor tense was established. The proportion of mixed tense usage by older children gradually approached that of an adult's proportion, with age. This indicates that in the course of development, the child learns to use the expressive options of a particular native language to carry out narrative discourse functions. These findings support the argument by Berman and Slobin (1994) that forms acquire broader and more discourse-motivated functions across different developmental phases, although the languages themselves differ in the extent to which a structural option is exploited by speakers.

## NOTES

- 1 One of the common views of tense switching for telling stories concerns the background and the foreground in narrative (Hopper, 1979).
- 2 See the CHILDES project (MacWhinney, 1991) for further details.
- 3 The texts were gathered in a project directed by Dan I. Slobin (Dept. of Psychology, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720) and Ruth A. Berman (Dept. of Linguistics, Tel Aviv University, Ramat Aviv 69978, Israel), with support from the U. S. -Israel Binational Science Foundation (Grant 2732/82), the Linguistics Program of the National Science Foundation (Grant BNS-8520008), the Sloan Foundation Program in Cognitive Science (Institute of Cognitive Studies, University of California, Berkeley), the Institute of Human Development (University of California, Berkeley), the Committee on Research of the Academic Senate (University of California, Berkeley), and the Max-Planck-Institute for Psycholinguistics (Nijmegen, Netherlands). English data were gathered at Berkeley by Tanya Renner and Virginia Marchman.
- 4 The verb nonpast (present/future) *-ru* form in Japanese is referred to as "present" form in this study.
- 5 The polite present form *-masu* and the polite past form *-mashita* appear in the narrative texts, as well as the informal forms *-ru* and *-ta*.
- 6 The present *-ru* and past *-ta* form can be used to express an imperfective/perfective contrast in Japanese. However, this study ignored the aspectual interpretation of these forms.
- 7 The clause ending with the *-te* conjunction (*oki-te*, "wake") is an examples of this. It is excluded since its temporal interpretation relies on the tense-aspect morphology that appeared in the verb of the final clause.
- 8 Verbs in subordinate clauses and nonfinite verbs sometimes did not mark tense in Japanese (Nakau, 1976; Iwasaki, 2001; Niwa, 2001). Therefore in the present analysis, clauses including those verb usages were excluded from the measurement.
- 9 *-teru* is a contracted form of progressive *-teiru*.
- 10 The *-ru* form of achievement verbs, for example, combined with the durative maker (morpheme) *-tei-* also indicate present perfect. Whether *-tei-* express present perfect or not depends on the lexical meaning of verbs.

## REFERENCES

- Berman, R.A., & Slobin, D.I. (1994). *Relating events in narrative: A crosslinguistic developmental study*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Casparis, C.P. (1975). *Tense without time: The present tense in narration*. Bern: Francke Verlag.

- Clancy, P.M. (1985). The acquisition of Japanese. In D.I. Slobin (Ed.), *The crosslinguistic study of language acquisition* (Vol.1: The data, pp.373-523): Lawrence Erlbaum Associate.
- Fujiwara, Y. (1976). *Yoji no gengo hyogen noryoku no hattatsu* [Development of linguistic representation in children] : Bunkahyoron Shuppan.
- Hopper, P.J. (1979). Aspect and foregrounding in discourse. In G. Talmy (Ed.), *Syntax and semantics* (Vol.12: Discourse and syntax, pp.213-241): Academic Press.
- Inaba, M. (1999). Development of global structure in first-language narratives. *The Bulletin of Aichi University of Education (Humanities/Societies)*, 48, 103-112.
- Inaba, M. (2001). Backtracking and reorganization in narrative. *The Bulletin of Aichi University of Education (Humanities/Societies)*, 50, 29-39.
- Inaba, M. (2002). The developmental sequence of children's narrative skills. *The Bulletin of Aichi University of Education (Humanities/Societies)*, 51, 29-41.
- Iwasaki, T. (2001). Fukubun ni okeru jisei [Tense in complex sentences] . *Gengo*, 30 (13), 51-55.
- Iwatate, S. (2001). Kodomo wa doo jisei o shutoku suruka [How do children acquire tense?] . *Gengo*, 30 (13), 78-79.
- Kudo, M. (1989). Gendai nihongo no pafekuto o megutte [The perfect tense in modern Japanese] . In Gengogakukenyukai (Ed.), *Kotoba no kagaku 3* (pp.53-118): Mugi Shobo.
- Kudo, M. (1995). *Asupekuto tensu taikai to tekusuto: gendai nihongo no jikan to hyogenn* [Aspect tense system and text: time and expressions in modern Japanese] . Tokyo: Hitsuji Shobo.
- MacWhinney, B. (1991). *The CHILDES project: Tools for analyzing talk*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Mayer, M. (1969). *Frog, where are you?* New York: Dial Press.
- Nakau, M. (1976). Tense, aspect, and modarity. In M. Shibatani (Ed.), *Japanese Generative Grammar* (Vol.5, pp.421-482). New York: Academic Press.
- Niwa, T. (2001). Rentai shushoku setsu no tensu to asupekuto [Tense and aspect in noun-modifying clauses] . *Gengo*, 30 (13), 56-62.
- Noji, J. (1973-77). *Yojiki no gengo seikatsu no jittai* [The actual conditions of language in an infant's life] : Bunkahyoronsha.
- Okubo, A. (1967). *Yojigengo no hattatsu* [Development of infant language] : Tokyodo Shuppan.
- Okubo, A. (1984). *Yojigengo no kenkyu: Kobun to goi* [The study of infant language: structure and lexicon] : Ayumi Shuppan.
- Shirai, Y. (1998). The emergence of tense-aspect morphology in Japanese: universal predisposition. *First Language*, 19, 281-309.
- Silva-Corvalan, C. (1983). Tense and aspect in oral Spanish narrative: Context and meaning. *Language*, 59, 760-780.
- Takahashi, T. (1985). *Gendai nihongo doshi no tensu to asupekuto* [Tense and aspect in modern Japanese] : Shuei Shuppan.
- Wolfson, N. (1982). *CHP: The conversational historical present in American English narrative*. Dordrecht: Foris Publications.

(Received September 3, 2002)