Verifying the "Transfer to Nowhere" Principle

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1. Transfer to Nowhere Hypothesis

This study investigates how Japanese as a second language (JL2) learners verbalize events in a narrative story. It pays particular attention to the aspectual marking in narrative discourse. One scene of a fictional story is picked up to specify the linguistic encoding of the event in JL2 in crosslinguistic developmental perspective.

The study is motivated by Slobin's work on "thinking for speaking" (Berman and Slobin 1994, Slobin 1991) in the field of first language (L1) acquisition. He claimed that language does not shape our thought; it acts as a "filter" on the way we talk about it. The study in Inaba (2004) investigated the aspectual marking of an event in a fictional story in Japanese and English narratives, and presented the following results. There are considerable differences in verbalization between Japanese and English narratives. The differences are attributed to the linguistic options provided by each language. Japanese and English children develop their linguistic proficiency in making use of the expressive options offered by the native language. These findings support Berman and Slobin's above-mentioned argument.

This study, then, treats the question of whether or not second language (L2) development is "filtered" through the choice of L1 perspectives, or the set of options provided by the L1, especially in the case of adult L2 learners who already have a particular perspective on events permitted by their L1. The theoretical background of the study in the field of L2 acquisition is Kellerman's proposal of the "transfer to nowhere" principle, which states that in verbalizing events in an L2, learners tend to seek linguistic tools which will permit them to maintain their L1 perspectives, rather than to look for perspectives peculiar to the L2 (Kellerman, 1995).

A fictional story elicited from adult JL2 learners at five different levels of JL2 proficiency was analyzed regarding developmental changes of the linguistic encoding. The focus of the study is aspectual marking in narrative discourse, since the preference for it is deeply connected to the linguistic possibilities provided by a particular language. The central issue is whether or not a linguistic representation of an event in L2 is filtered through the choice of perspectives, or the set of options provided by their L1.

The first analysis presented the aspectual marking favored by JL2 learners across five proficiency levels, and characterized the encoding at each level. The second analysis compared the results from JL2 learners with those of JL1 and EL1 development, presented in Inaba (2004), in order to explore L2 linguistic representation. The results are discussed within the framework of Kellerman's transfer to nowhere principle.

2. Method

2.1 Subjects: JL2 Learners

The subjects were English native speakers who were studying or had learned JL2. They consisted of five groups of learners at different levels of JL2 proficiency. These levels were elementary (Level I), pre-intermediate (Level II), intermediate (Level III), advanced (Level IV) and post-advanced (Level V). There were ten subjects in each group. The procedure and instructions given when the data were collected, the assignment of level standards and further information about these subjects can be found in Inaba (2000).

2.2 The Falling Event

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 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. The aspectual marking for the falling event in Picture 17, which depicts the boy and dog in mid-fall from the cliff, is picked up in the analyses. It is referred to as a "falling event" hereafter. The picture 17 is found in Inaba (2004).

3. Analysis I: Encoding by JL2 Learners

The first investigation concerns the way L2 learners encode the falling event in picture 17. Table 1 shows the percentages of JL2 learners who used verbs to narrate the picture. It indicates that most learners used a verb in some way. The verbs frequently used to encode it were "*ochiru* (to fall", "*otosu* (to drop)", "*nageru* (to throw)"[1] and so on.

Table 1: Percentage of JL2 Learners Mentioning the Falling Event in Picture 17

%	Level (N=10 per group)				
	I	II	III	IV	V
Mention	80	90	100	100	100

There are three subjects who did not mention the boy and dog's fall. One of them only referred to the deer's action, as in Ex. 1, and another only described the pond, shown in Ex. 2, and the third mentioned nothing about the scene. These three subjects were excluded from the following analyses.

Ex. 1   *Shika wa tomarimasu.*
        'The deer stops.' [E-I-i]

Ex. 2   *Tonari ni ike ga arimashita.*
        'There was a pond next to (the cliff)' [E-II-j]

JL2 learners encoded the falling event with four different forms: simple form, complete form, progressive form and '*-teiku*' form. The simple form is a verb with no aspect morpheme. The complete form is a verb with "*teshimau*[2]". It expresses the completion of the action, emphasizing the result of the action. This study refers to it as "completive aspect". The progressive form is a verb with "*-teiru*[3]". The "*teiku*" form expresses the meaning that some action or state keeps changing from the point of time at which the speaker first describes the action, meaning "*ongoing, or continue*".

Table 2 shows the distribution of the JL2 learners' aspectual marking for the event. The numbers show the proportion of simple, complete, progressive, and *-teiku* forms used by the JL2 learners who mentioned the falling event with verbs.

Table 2: Aspect Marking for Picture 17 by JL2 Learners

Aspect Maker	Level (N=10 per group)				
%	I	II	III	IV	V
Simple Form	75	100	60	70	50
Complete Form	0	0	10	30	40
Progressive Form	25	0	20	0	10
-Tekuru Form	0	0	10	0	0

JL2 learners at all levels in the sample preferred to use the simple form. 75% of Level-I and all of Level-II learners recounted the event with the simple form. The rates for it declined between Level-III and Level-V learners, however, who chose it more than 50% of the time. The texts for Picture 17 below are excerpted from the texts in which JL2 learners used the simple form at various levels.

Ex. 3   *Otokonoko to inu wa ike ni otoshimashita*[4].
'The boy and the dog fell into (were dropped into) the pond.' [E-II-c]

Ex. 4   *Shika wa gake ni itte otokonoko o otoshita. Inu wa tomarenakatta node inu mo gake kara ochita.*
'The deer went up to a cliff and dropped the boy off. As the dog could not stop (at the edge of the cliff), he fell off the cliff.' [E-III-e]

Ex. 5   *Gake ni kita kara shika wa kyuni tomarimashita. Hontouni kyuni tomarimashita kara otokonoko mo inu mo ike ni ochimashita.*
'The deer stopped suddenly because he came to the cliff. As the deer stopped really suddenly, both the boy and the dog fell into the pond.' [E-IV-i]

Ex. 6   *Chodo gake no tokoro de shika ga kyuuni tomatte inu mo shonen mo shita no ike ni ochimashita.*
'The deer stopped suddenly right at the cliff and both the boy and the dog fell into the pond below.' [E-V-b]

The complete form was far less frequently used than the simple form, and the rate of usage is lower than 40%. Note that Japanese children and adults strongly preferred to encode it with the complete form.[5] However, complete forms were not found in the texts of Level-I and Level-II learners. Only 10% of Level III learners, and 30% of Level IV learners encoded with the complete form. Even learners at Level V did not choose this form more frequently than the simple form. Note that Level-V learners were the ones who lived in the target language environment for a rather long time: one spent twenty years and the other eight years, and their JL2 proficiency levels were fairly high. The following are examples of the complete form used by JL2 learners at various levels. All of the complete forms were used in the past tense.

Ex. 7   *Gake no mae ni shika ga kyu ni tomarimashite, otokonoko to inu ga gake kara ochiteshimatta.*
'The deer stopped suddenly in front of (the edge of) the cliff, (and) the boy and the dog have fallen off the cliff (unfortunately).' [E-III-i]

Ex. 8   *Shika wa hashittetauchini gake ga totsuzen demashita kara, kyuni tomete, {ano} otokonoko to inu wa gake kara ochiteshimaimashita.*
'While the deer was running, it stopped short as a cliff suddenly appeared, and the boy and the

dog have fallen off the cliff (unfortunately).' [E-IV-f]

Ex. 9   *Kyuuni shika hashiridashita, takai gake made hashitteitte, sonoue de kyuuni tomatte Taro-kun ga*
          tsuno no {ue kara} nakakara ochiteshimaimashita. Waa fukai tanida.
          'The deer began running, (and) he run up to a high cliff, (and) stopped suddenly, (and) Taro (the
          boy) has fallen off the deer's antlers (unfortunately). It is a deep valley.' [E-V-a]

The form they used other than the simple and the complete forms is the progressive form. 25% of Level-I, 20% of Level-III learners and 10% of Level-V learners used it. An example is shown below. The form they used other than the simple and the complete forms is the progressive form. 25% of Level-I, 20% of Level-III learners and 10% of Level-V learners used it. An example is shown below.

Ex. 10   (*Shika wa*) *gake kita kara, shika tomatte otokonoko to inu-chan ga gake kara ochiteimashita.*
          'As (the deer) came to a cliff, he stopped, (and) the boy and the dog were falling off the cliff.'
          [E-III-g]

It should be noted here that the progressive form is not appropriate in this case. None of the Japanese adults or children recounts it with the progressive form. The progressive form of *"Ochiteiru"* does not mean *"to be falling"* in Japanese. It expresses a resultant state (resultative) of the action, shown in Ex. 11.

Ex. 11   *Yuka ni hankachi ga <u>ochiteiru</u>. Dare ga otoshita no darou.*
          'A handkerchief is on the floor. Who dropped it?'

One of the Learners at Level V used a combination of complete and progressive form (*ochiteshimatteimasu*)[6] as shown below. This form is not found Japanese native speaker's texts.

Ex. 12   *Gake no tokoro de shika ga tomatta n desu keredomo, sonokekka, otokonoko ga gake kara ochite, inu*
          mo issho ni ochiteshimattemasu.
          'The deer stopped at a cliff, as a result the boy fell off the cliff, and the dog also has been falling
          off the cliff together.' [E-V-f]

There was one learner who used -*tekuru* form. Ex. 13 is an example of this usage. Note that it is not an appropriate expression in this case. It should be -*teiku*.

Ex. 13   *Sono shika ga gake ni kyuni tomarimashita. Satoshi-kun to wanchan ga ochitekimashita.*
          'The deer stopped suddenly at a cliff. Satoshi-kun (the boy) and the dog continued to fall off.'
          [E-III-b]

Although it is not an appropriate form for recounting this event, it can be interpreted as evidence that the learner tried to use some linguistic device for aspectual marking.

In summary, four kinds of aspectual marking were found in JL2 narratives. They strongly favor the simple form for the scene. It emerges in the early stage of development. The complete form, which is most commonly used in the target language, is not so much used by the subjects, and this holds across all levels. The progressive form, which is not found in JL1 narratives, is used by JL2 learners. In developmental terms, they showed diversity in the middle stage of development. That is, the four forms appeared in Level III.

4. Analysis II: Comparison of JL2, JL1 and EL1 Encoding

4.1 The Simple Form

The analysis in this section compares the results from the JL2 learners with those of JL1 and EL1 in order

to explore L2 aspectual marking. JL1 and EL1 data were adapted from Inaba (2004), which concerned aspectual marking by the JL1 and EL1, and original figures were reproduced in Figures 1-3.
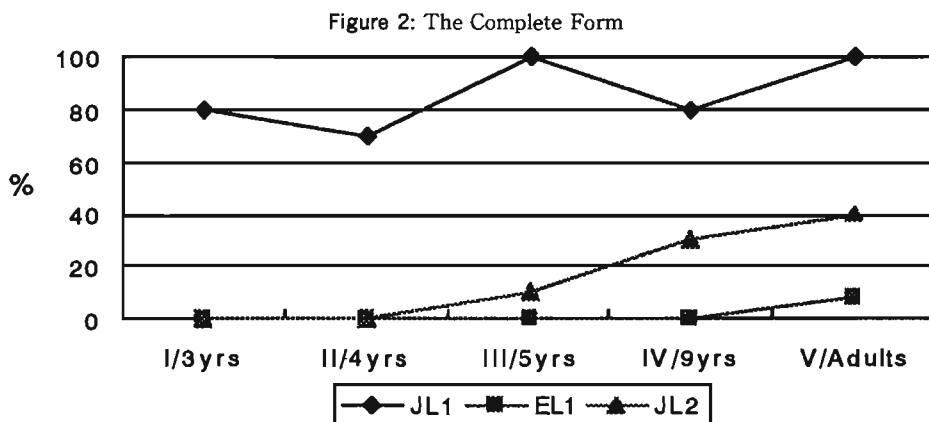
Figure 1 shows developmental changes of the simple form for JL2, JL1 and EL1. In JL1 development, the rates of usage for this form are quite low on the whole, suggesting that it is a less common or favored form in Japanese narratives. By contrast, in the EL1 development, the rates of usage are quite high across all ages, and it is the most favored form in English narratives. In the case of JL2 development, it is the predominant form at all, although it is not the common form in JL1. Comparing these three developmental changes, JL2 learners showed a choice of form similar to EL1, rather than to JL1. All of their English versions for this scene were encoded in the simple form.

Figure 1: The Simple Form
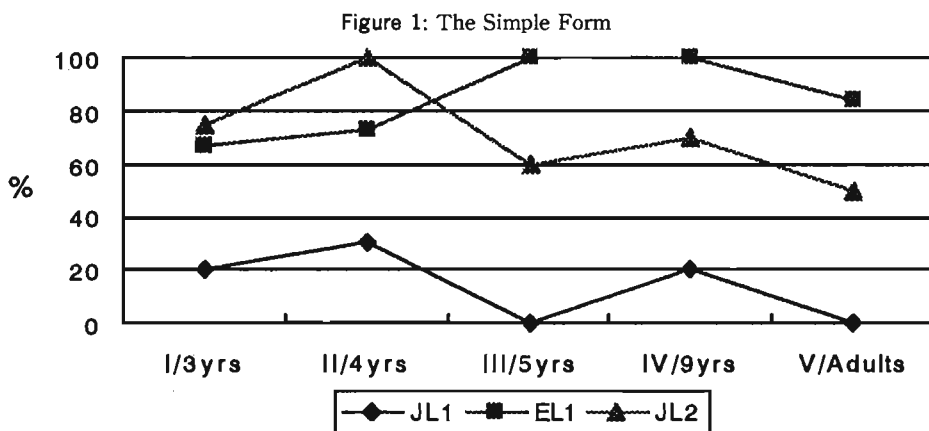
4.2 The Complete Form

Figure 2 shows developmental changes in the use of the complete form for JL2 and JL1 and of the perfect form for EL1. In JL1 development, the usage rates for the complete form are quite high on the whole, suggesting that it is the most common or favored form in Japanese narratives. The young children already favor to use it. In contrast, in the EL1 development, the perfect form is rarely found across ages, suggesting that it is not the common form in English narratives. Only an adult uses it. In the case of JL2 development, the rates for the complete form are quite low on the whole. None of Level-I and Level-II learners used it. These rates show some increase at higher levels, which indicates that they gradually learned to choose this form to encode this scene.

Comparing these three developmental changes, JL2 learners showed a preference for a form similar to EL1 rather than to JL1, especially at the early stage of development. With the development of JL2 proficiency, they gradually tend to make choices similar in form to the JL1.

Figure 2: The Complete Form

4.3 The Progressive Form

Figure 3 shows the developmental changes of the progressive form for JL2, JL1 and EL1. In JL1 development, none of the subjects recounted the story using the progressive form, suggesting that it is not a common or appropriate form in Japanese narratives.

In the development of EL1, the progressive form was used at a rate around 30% in the early stage of development. Since the progressive form has much to do with the picture description narrative, some of the younger children used it. The rates declined with age. None of the 5- and 9-year-olds used it. It was rarely found in older children's text, indicating that it is a characteristic of juvenile narrative in English. Since one of the adults used it in EL1[7], it could be a kind of narrative style in EL1 mature narrative.

The developmental change of JL2 shows a similar picture to EL1, rather than JL2. That is, the progressive form was observed in early stages of development, and it decreased with linguistic development. It is also similar in that it is found in the advanced stage of development, since one of the Level-V learners used it as a kind of narrative style.

Figure 3: The Progressive Form
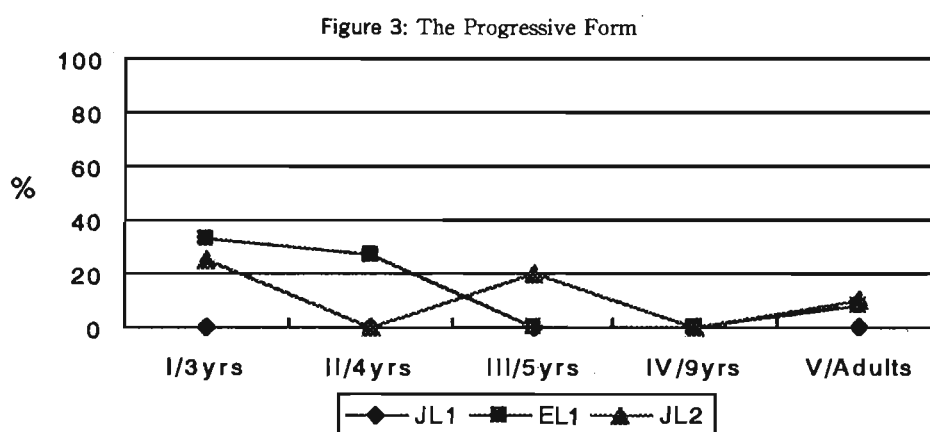
5. Characteristics of Aspectual Marking in JL2

JL2 learners showed quite a difference in aspectual marking from JL1 learners. They strongly favored the simple form, while Japanese narrators favored it less. JL1 narrators most favored the complete form. JL2 learners at all levels predominantly used the simple form. They used the complete form less frequently, although it is the most common encoding in the target language (JL1). Even the majority of Level-V learners, who have more JL2 learning experience, preferred to use the simple form.

It should be noted here that the simple form is the most favored form in EL1, and the complete form is one of the Japanese specific forms. This provides the evidence that L2 learners tend to seek linguistic tools that will permit them to maintain their L1 perspectives, rather than to look for perspectives peculiar to the L2 in verbalizing events in a L2. Some of the JL2 learners used a progressive form where it was not found in JL1 narratives but was found in EL1 narratives. This would be further evidence that they maintain their L1 perspective in L2 verbalization.

In crosslinguistic developmental perspective, JL2 learners showed a choice of forms similar to EL1 rather than to JL1, especially at the early stage of development. This suggests that they try to find a linguistic option available in their L1, rather than the L2 when their L2 linguistic command is not sufficient. With the development of JL2 proficiency, they gradually come to show a choice of form similar to the JL1. The study of the anchor tense in JL2 narrative in Inaba (2003) also presented that JL2 learners showed a preference of the tense favored in their L1, especially at the early stage of development.

The choice of aspectual marking in narrative is deeply influenced by the linguistic possibilities provided by the language, although it is deeply connected with the narrator's perspective on the event, style of narration and so on (Berman and Slobin, 1994). The study in Inaba (2004) shows that there is a favored choice in JL1

and EL1. The preference derives from the linguistic possibilities provided by the language. The results of this study suggest that the choice of aspectual marking in L2 narrative is influenced by the L1, since aspectual distinction is acquired through their L1, and it is one of a set of difficult categories that have no direct reflection in one's perceptual or practical dealings with the world. In other words, the conceptualization of L2 experiences is filtered through L1 perspective.

6. Filtering in L2 Representation

This study revealed that L2 learners showed a strong preference for the linguistic encoding favored by their L1, and even advanced learners had difficulty in choosing or encoding options provided particularly by the L2. This suggests that L1 "filters" the conceptualization of L2 experiences through the choice of perspective and through the verbalization of events in the case of adult L2 acquisition. All these results support Kellerman's (1995) proposal of the "transfer to nowhere" principle that, in verbalizing events in a L2, learners tend to seek linguistic tools that will permit them to maintain their L1 perspectives, rather than to look for perspectives peculiar to the L2. Since this study is limited to the aspectual marking of only one scene of a fictional story, further analyses drawing on other linguistic categories or choices of perspective such as selection of topic, event view, and so on are called for.

Notes

1   "*Nageru* (to throw)" was not found in the texts of Japanese native speakers.
2   See Inaba (2004).
3   The "*-teiru*" form also expresses the resultant state of the action. However, the interpretation for the progressive (imperfective/durative) aspect was considered to be appropriate for this scene. Thus, it is referred to as "progressive" form in this study.
4   "*Otoshimashita*" here supposed to be "*ochimashita*" in the context.
5   See Inaba (2004).
6   This subject's speech is assigned to the progressive form.
7   One adult (8%) used it, with a more global plot-based motivation. It is a kind of style of narration. See Inaba (2004).

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