Aspectual Marking in Japanese and English Narrative

Midori INABA

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

1. Introduction

Every language has a different way to talk about an event. This study investigated how Japanese and English native speakers verbalize events in a narrative story, to demonstrate that a particular language has its own specific way of verbalizing events. This way is deeply influenced by linguistic features or options available in that particular language. Children develop their linguistic proficiency in making use of the expressive options offered by the native language.

The theoretical background of this study is Slobin's work on "thinking for speaking" (Berman and Slobin 1994; Slobin, 1991) in the field of L1 acquisition. He claimed that language does not shape our thought; it acts as a "filter" on the way we talk about it. The world does not present "events" to be encoded in language. Rather, experiences are filtered – through choice of perspectives, and through the set of options provided by the particular language – into verbalized events. Examining the several ways of relating events in narrative across five different languages[1], Berman and Slobin (1994) found that there is a language-specific type of narration, e.g., an "English type" or a "Turkish type" of narration. That is because the various formal options available in a particular language orient speakers to particular patterns of information selection and information flow. These "rhetorical types" reflect underlying processes of "thinking for speaking" in a particular language.

The present study examined these arguments in regard to Japanese and English narratives. Since Berman and Slobin's research is conducted on various languages other than Japanese, the present study includes Japanese narrative as well as English. Fictional stories elicited from Japanese children and adults, and English children and adults were analyzed to explore the linguistic features of their verbalization.

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. Aspectual marking for one scene of a fictional story is picked up to specify the linguistic encoding of the event in each language (Japanese and English) in developmental perspective. The central issue is whether or not a linguistic representation of an event is filtered through the choice of perspectives, or the set of options provided by each language.
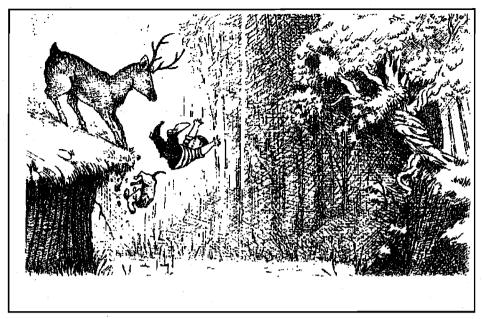
The first analysis concerns the aspectual marking of an event by Japanese children and adults. The second analysis deals with that by English children and adults. The linguistic features of both languages are discussed examining the idea of "thinking for speaking". The results of the study provide further evidence to confirm this idea.

2. Method

2.1 Japanese and English Narratives

Japanese narratives were elicited from Japanese children aged from 3- to 11-year-olds and adults. All subjects were Japanese native speakers. They were divided into 10 groups according to their age.[2]

English narratives were adopted from the database. Transcripts gathered by the use of the same picture storybook as the present study are available in the CHILDES (Child Language Data Exchange System) archive.[3] English stories were elicited from English-speaking children, ages 3, 4, 5 and 9, and adults were used in the study. Each group consisted of twelve subjects.

(Picture 17: Mayer, 1969)

2.2 Selected Scene

The 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 the mid-fall from the cliff, is picked up in the analyses. It is referred to as a "falling event" hereafter.

Although the choice of aspect marking in narrative is deeply connected with the narrator's perspective on the event, style of narration and so on, it is a fact that there is a favored choice in each language. The preference derives from the linguistic possibilities provided by the language. However, aspect distinction is particularly hard to acquire, since it is one of a set of difficult categories that have no direct reflection in one's perceptual or practical dealings with the world. Furthermore, it can only be learned through language, and has no other use except to be expressed in language. It does not belong to categories of thought in general, but to categories of "thinking for speaking" (Berman and Slobin, 1994).

3. Encoding by Japanese Native Speakers

The first investigation concerns the way Japanese children and adults encode the falling event in picture 17. Table 1 shows the percentages of subjects who used verbs to narrate the picture. It indicates that most people used a verb in some way. The verbs mainly used to encode it were 'ochiru' and 'otosu'. 'Ochiru' is an intransitive verb, meaning 'to fall', and 'otosu' is the transitive form of ochiru, meaning 'to drop'.

Table 1: Percentage of Japanese Children and Adults Mentioning the Falling Event in Picture 17

%	Age (N = 10 per group)									
	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Adult
Mention	100	100	100	90	90	100	100	100	100	90

There are three subjects who did not use verbs to encode it. One of them used direct speech, as in Ex. 1, and the others used an adverbial expression *'massakasama'*, meaning directly going down, shown in Ex. 2 and Ex. 3.

Ex. 1   *Waa, tasukete!*
            'Aaah! Help me!' [J6j-6; 11][4]

Ex. 2   *Soshite shika ga tommata node Otokonoko to inu wa massakari.*[5]
            'And then the boy and the dog fell headlong because the deer had stopped.' [J7j-7; 11]

Ex. 3   *Shika no tomatta tokoro wa choudo gakeppuchi deshita. Kazuto-kun to Yosshii wa ikioi amatte gakeshita e massakasama desu.*
            'The place where the deer stopped was right on the end of the cliff. Kazuto-kun (a boy) and Yosshii (a dog) fell headlong below the cliff.' [J20j]

Japanese children and adults encoded the falling event with three different forms: simple form, complete form and *'-teiku'* form. The simple form is a verb with no aspect morpheme. The complete form is a verb with *'teshimau/-chau'*[6]. It expresses the completion of the action, emphasizing the result of the action. This study refers to it as "completive aspect". 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 subjects' aspectual marking for the event. The numbers show the proportion of simple, complete, and *-teiku* forms used by subjects who mentioned the falling event with verbs.

Table 2: Aspectual Marking for Picture 17 by Japanese Children and Adults

Form	Age (N = 10 per group)									
%	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Adult
Simple Form	20	30	0	33	33	50	20	40	0	0
Complete Form	80	70	100	67	67	50	80	50	90	100
-teiku Form	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	0

Japanese children at all ages in the sample preferred to use the complete form. 80% of the 3-year-olds, 70% of the 4-year-olds, and 100% of the 5-year-olds used it. The rates for it declined between 6- and 8-year -olds, however, it increased to 80% at age 9, and reached 90% at age 11. The texts for Picture 17 below are excerpted from the texts in which children used the complete form at various ages.

Ex. 4   *Ochichatta.*
            '(The boy) fell.' [J3a-3; 02]

Ex. 5   *Sonotoki soko wa gake deshita. Shin-chan to inu wa ochiteshimaimashita.*
            'Then there was a cliff. Shin-chan (a boy) and the dog have fallen (unfortunately).' [J5g-5; 04]

Ex. 6   *(Shika ga) ikinari gake de tomatta node, Mayer mo inu mo numa ni ochiteshimaimashita.*
            'Mayer (the boy) and the dog fell into the swamp, because (the deer) stopped suddenly at the cliff.' [J9e-9; 02]

Ex. 7   *Shika ga kyuu ni tomatte, sono gake ni Otokonoko to inu ga ochiteshimaimashita.*
         'The deer stopped suddenly, and the boy and the dog fell off the cliff.' [J11i-9; 07]

All Japanese adults strongly preferred to encode it with the complete form. That is, the complete form was the most common way to encode the event in mature narrative. All the subjects except two of the 3-year-olds used the complete form in the past tense in their narration. The following is an example of an adult's text.

Ex. 8   *Gake no sentan made kuruto, shika wa ikiyoiyoku atama o furimashita. To douji ni otokonoko wa massakasama ni ochiteshimaimashita. Inu mo ikioi amatte gakekara hyuu, ochiteshimaimashita.*
         When (the deer) came up to the ege of the cliff, he shook his head by forcefully. At the same time the boy had fallen headlong (unfortunately). The dog had also fallen down (unfortunately).
         [J20j]

The simple form was far less frequently used than the complete form, and the rate of usage is lower than 50%. The 8-year-olds used it most frequently. Children of other ages showed a lower rate, and none of the adult narrators used it. The following are examples of the simple form used by Japanese children at various ages. It should be noted that all of the simple forms were used in the past tense.[7]

Ex. 9   *Ochita.*
         '(The boy) fell.' [J3f-3; 08]

Ex. 10   *Inu to Otokonoko wa shitani, ike ni ochita.*
         'The dog and the boy fell down, fell into the pond.' [J3i-3; 11]

Ex. 11   *Otokonoko wa gakekara wanchan to issho ni ochimashita.*
         'The boy fell off the cliff with the dog.' [J6e-6; 07]

Ex. 12   *Sokode Otokonoko wa waa to itte, Pochi mo ochimashita.*
         'There, the boy said "aaaah", and the dog fell off.' [J8i-8; 10]

Ex. 13   *Soshite shika ga kyuuni tomari, Tom-kun to Jack wa gake ni ochimashita.*
         'And then the deer stopped suddenly, and Tom (the boy) and Jack (the dog) fell off the cliff.'
         [J9h-9; 08]

The majority of the simple forms used by the 7-, 8- and 10-year-olds were encoded by the transitive verb *'Otosu'*. The subject of the verb is "the deer", as shown in Ex. 14.

Ex. 14   *Sorekara, Shika wa Otokonoko to inu o otoshimashita.*
         'And then the deer threw the boy and dog off' [J8d-6; 08]

There were two children who used *-teiku* form. Ex. 15 is an example for it.

Ex. 15   *Soshite John-kun to Jun-kun wa gake no shita e ochiteikimashita.*
         'And John (a boy) and Jun (his dog) continued to fall to the bottom of the cliff.' [J11d-11; 03]

In summary, three kinds of aspectual marking were found in Japanese narratives. The complete form is the most common encoding across all ages. It emerges in the early stage of development, suggesting that children already have a linguistic command of this form.[8] The number of people using the simple form is relatively small. None of the adults used it. The progressive form that was used in English narratives (see section 4) was not found in Japanese narratives.

It should be noted here that the complete form is a specifically Japanese form. It expresses the idea of completion of the action, emphasizing not the process or the action itself, but the result.[9] It also expresses the idea that someone did something that he should not have done, or something happened which should not have happened. It can be used in a situation in which the event is beyond one's control, implying that things turned out in a surprising or regrettable way.

The English perfective aspect is similar to the completive aspect in that these two express completion of the action.[10] However, the English perfective aspect itself does not express an emotional attitude toward the action or event such as regret or criticism and so on. It rather focuses on describing a temporal (aspectual) phase of an event or action. Thus, the complete form can be considered a Japanese-specific aspect marker, since it combines the aspectual phase of the event and the agent's or speaker's modal attitude toward the event.

In their aspectual marking for the falling event, most of the Japanese narrators preferred the complete form to recount it. If a narrator used the complete form in this case, he/she attempted to convey the meaning that the falling event is an unexpected, unfortunate occurrence that should not have happened.

The simple form is used among older children, but it is not used in the mature narratives. All the Japanese narrators who used simple forms, used the past tense (simple past form). The simple past form can also express the completion of an action. This indicates that Japanese narrators tended to encode this scene with the linguistic devices that express completion of action.

Although the picture depicts the action of the boy and the dog in midfall off the cliff, none of the children encoded it in the progressive aspect. Even the youngest children, who frequently use the progressive aspect (forms) for describing the other scenes, did not use it for this scene. One possible reason for this is that the progressive form is not available in this case. Almost all of Japanese narrators encoded this scene with verbs such as 'ochiru', intransitive verb meaning 'to fall'. The progressive form of it, 'ochiteiru', does not mean the progressive action in Japanese. It expresses the meaning of the resultant state of an action, which is often referred to as "resultative". Thus, the fact that none of Japanese children used the progressive form suggests they already knew this form is not appropriate for this scene.

4. Encoding by English Native Speakers

The second analysis concerns the way English children and adults encode the falling event in Picture 17. Table 3 shows the percentages of subjects who used verbs. The figures showed that most subjects described the event with verbs. The verbs they frequently used are 'to fall' (e.g. fall off, fall down, fall into), and 'to throw' (e.g. throw over, throw into, throw down).

Table 3: Percentage of English Children and Adults Mentioning the Falling Event in Picture 17

%	Age (N = 12 per group)				
	3	4	5	9	Adult
Mention	100	92	92	100	100

Three kinds of aspectual markings were found in their texts: simple, progressive, and perfect forms. Table 4 shows the distribution of aspectual markings for Picture 17 by English children and adults.

The simple form is the most common across all ages. The youngest children already showed a preference for it. The preference became more pronounced with older children; more than 70% of the 4-, 5- and 9-year-olds used it. The adults showed a slightly lower rate, probably because some of them used other aspect markers to make the narrative more sophisticated. The examples below are excerpts from 4- and 9-year-olds1 and adults' texts.

Table 4: Aspectual Marking for Picture 17 by English Children and Adults

Form	Age (N = 12 per group)				
%	3	4	5	9	Adult
Simple Form	67	73	100	100	84
Perfect Form	0	0	0	0	8
Progressive Form	33	27	0	0	8

Ex. 16   *And then they both fell straight down into the water.* [E4e-4; 7]

Ex. 17   *And the deer just stopped, and the boy and the dog fell off a cliff.* [*mhm,*] *into a swamp.* [E9I-9; 10]

Ex. 18   *... and - stops at a cliff and the boy and the dog - fall - into a lake.* [E20g]

Another form used by them is the progressive form. The 3-year-olds used it most frequently (33%). However, the rates for it decreased with increasing age. Note that only 27% of the 4-year-olds used it, and none of the older children used it. One adult (8%) used it, with a more global plot-based motivation. This would be because their narrative shifts from picture description mode to narrative discourse mode. The following examples by a child and an adult illustrate these features.

Ex. 19   *... and the boy's falling.* [E3b-3; 4]

Ex. 20   *Well it was of no use because the dog. ... ran off the edge of the cliff while the boy was thrown off by the elk. And they're both falling off the little cliff into what seems to be a pond.* [20c]

The perfect form is only used by an adult.

Ex. 21   *now the - deer has thrown {the dog - no} the boy - over the cliff into - it looks like they're heading for a pond and the dog goes too.* [E20b]

Table 5 shows the percentage of tense marking of the simple form by English children and adults. It reveals that the narrators in all ages used both past and present tense. The adult subjects predominantly used the present tense.

Table 5: Tense Marking for the Simple Forms by English Children and Adults

Tense marking	Age (N = 12 per group)				
	3	4	5	9	Adult
Number of Simple Form	8	8	11	12	10
Past (%)	75	50	64	67	20
Present (%)	25	50	36	33	80

In summary, three kinds of aspectual marking were found in English narratives. The simple form was the most favored way to recount the event across all ages. It emerged in the early stage of development, and it is the most common encoding in the mature English narratives. They used the simple form both in the past and present tense, in contrast to the Japanese narrators who used the simple form only in the past tense. The progressive form is used in the early stage of development. The children used it as a picture description strategy. It should be noted here that none of the Japanese narrators used it. The perfect form is rarely used for this scene, although the complete form is the most favored way among Japanese narrators. These results indicate that English narrators presented a quite different encoding form from Japanese narrators. It suggests that English, too, has a specific way to talk about the event, reflecting each perspective for this event.

5. Discussion

Japanese and English narrators showed quite different aspectual marking for encoding the event. Japanese narrators strongly favored the complete form, while English narrators favored the simple form. All the Japanese children used the simple forms in the past tense, indicating the completion of an event. On the other hand, English narrators used them both in the past and present tense. That is, Japanese narrators tend to use the linguistic device expressing the completion of action for this particular scene. English narrators, however, tend to express it both with complete (past) and incomplete (present) aspectual markings. In English, both past and present tense markings would be rhetorically common. This is one of the rhetorical differences between Japanese and English narratives. These differences indicate that Japanese and English have their own ways of encoding events.[11] This provides further evidence that a particular language has its own specific way of verbalizing events.

The preference for encoding the event is related to the linguistic features of each language. English narrators used the progressive form, but none of the Japanese narrators used it. The English children used it as a picture-description strategy in the early stage of development. However, Japanese children did not use it, since it is grammatically inappropriate to encode this particular event in Japanese (see section 3). They have to find an alternative way to realize their picture-description strategy among the linguistic options available in Japanese, resulting in choosing complete form or -teiku form. These findings indicate that the way of verbalization is deeply influenced by the linguistic features or linguistic options available in a particular language.

Japanese and English children showed a similar preference to the adults' encoding. Japanese children favored the complete form, and English children favored the simple form. Even the youngest children in each language groups manifested the same preference as the adults, suggesting that they already have a command of predominantly used form. The fact that none of the Japanese children used the progressive form suggests they already knew this form is not appropriate for this scene. Since the choice of form reflects the perspective taken for the event, they already have a similar perspective to the adults, in the sense that they choose the same linguistic device. In developmental terms, the distribution of the favored form moved toward an adults' distribution in both languages. Thus, Japanese and English children develop their linguistic proficiency in making use of the expressive options offered by the native language.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated the aspectual marking of an event of a fictional story in Japanese and English narratives. Considerable differences were found in verbalization between Japanese and English narratives, suggesting that Japanese and English have different ways to talk about an event. 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. All these results support Berman and Slobin's (1994) proposal that experiences are filtered through a choice of perspectives, and through the set of options provided by the particular language into verbalized events. Since this study is limited to the analysis of only one scene of a fictional story, further analyses drawing on other scenes are called

for.

Notes

1 They are English, German, Spanish, Hebrew and Turkey.
2 Further information about the subjects can be found in Inaba (1999).
3 See the CHILDES project (MacWhinney, 1991) for further details.
4 The codes for a subject in the database, along with age and months are indicated in the brackets.
5 *'Massakari'* supposed to mean *'massakasama'*
6 *'-chau'* is a contracted form of *-teshimasu*.
7 The interpretation of tense of *-te* form of a verb is followed the tense of the main clause.
8 This finding confirmed the research conducted by Clancy (1985), reporting that the complete (past) form was acquired in the early stages of Japanese first language acquisition.
9 See examples as follws:
   Tom wa shukudai o yatte shimatta.
   'Tom has finished his homework.'
   Kate wa nihongo o wasurete shimatta.
   'Kate has forgotten Japanese.'
10 See examples as follows:
   Watashi wa chigau densha ni notte shimatta.
   'I (mistakenly) got on the wrong train.'
   Jane ga kabin o watte shimatta.
   'Jane (unintentionally) broke the vase.'
   Kanaria ga kago kara nigete shimatta.
   '(To my regret,) the canary flew away out of the cage.'
11 Inaba (2003) presented that the anchor tense in Japanese and English narrative is different.

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