Grammatical Structure of Sentence and Speaker's Point of View in L2 Acquisition of Japanese Giving and Receiving Verb Constructions*

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要旨

本稿では、ロシア語を母語とする日本語学習者による日本語の授受動詞構文の習得プロセスに「視点」と「動作者主語」の要因のどちらが影響を与えるかを検討した。調査は85人の中級レベルの学習者に対し動詞選択テストを用いて実施した。統計的分析の結果、本動詞構文と補助動詞構文の習得プロセスはそれぞれ異なるということが明らかになった。動作者主語を求める「～テクレル」と「～テアゲル」補助動詞構文が最もわかりやすかったという結果から、補助動詞構文における主語は行為の動作者であることが習得を容易にすることが確認された。それに対して、表現者の視点を主語に求める「アゲル」と「モラウ」本動詞構文は比較的わかりやすかったという結果から、「表現者の視点」の要因も習得に影響を与える可能性があるということがわかった。また、ほとんどの学習者は「表現者の視点」を一人称代名詞と結びつけることが明らかになり、日本語の「ウチ・ソト」指示体系の習得は困難であるということを示唆する結果となった。

Key Words: second language acquisition, Japanese giving and receiving verbs, speaker's point of view, empathy focus, subject of sentence.

1. Introduction

Japanese giving and receiving verbs *ageru*, *kureru* (to give) and *morau* (to receive) describe the giving and receiving of objects, while their auxiliary counterparts in such constructions as V-*te ageru*, V-*te kureru* and V-*te morau* express benefactive events. We call 'benefactive event' the situation, when one person (benefactor) performs an action, which benefits another person (beneficiary). In the both cases of basic use of the verbs of giving and receiving and their auxiliary use in benefactive constructions, the configuration of the case markers is the same: 'N-*ga* N-*ni* N-*o* (V-*te*) *ageru/kureru/morau*'. However, the semantic interpretation of the case particles is different. With verbs of giving, the subject particle *ga* marks the agent or source and the particle *ni* marks the recipient or goal. In contrast, with verbs of receiving, *ga* marks the recipient/goal and *ni* marks the agent/source.

Both *ageru* and *kureru* translate as 'to give' in English but they are semantically different. If the indirect object (noun with the particle *ni*) refers to a person who belongs to the speaker's inner group (such as his/her brother, sister, friends, etc.) or who is in a closer relation to the speaker relative to the subject, then the verb *kureru* is used. If the speaker's relation to the referent of the indirect object is less close or that to the subject is closer than to the indirect object referent, then *ageru* is used. After Uyeno et al. (1978), we will refer to the speaker's judgement on the relation to the person appearing as the subject, the indirect object, etc., as the speaker's point of view. We can say then, if the speaker is taking the viewpoint of the giver (or the giver of favor, benefactor) he/she uses *ageru*, if of the recipient (or recipient of favor, beneficiary), *kureru* must be used. With *morau*, the speaker must take point of view of the recipient, which is appearing as the subject.

Kuno has described these constraints in terms of "empathy". He has defined empathy as "the speaker's identification ... with a person/thing that participates in the event or state that he describes in a sentence" (Kuno 1987, p.206). Speakers must empathize with themselves or in-group members. We will use the terms 'the point of view' and 'the focus of empathy' interchangeably throughout this article. In syntactic terms, the focus of empathy is the subject with *ageru* and *morau*, and the indirect object with *kureru*. However, there is a possibility to use *ageru* or *morau* in the case of describing giving and receiving events involving third parties who are equally unrelated to the speaker. Thus, as Clancy (1985) have pointed out, *kureru* is the most strongly constrained verb with respect to empathy.

Table 1, based upon Uyeno et al. (1978), and Clancy (1985), summarizes the grammatical relations, case marking, semantic relations, and empathy focus involved in the different giving-receiving and benefactive constructions.

Table 1. Grammatical Relations, Semantic Relations, Case Marking, and Empathy Focus in Sentences with giving and receiving verbs (Adapted from Uyeno et al. 1978, and Clancy 1985)

SUBJECT/AGENT Giver (Empathy focus)	*ga*	INDIRECT OBJECT Recipient	*ni*		*ageru*
SUBJECT/AGENT Benefactor Empathy focus	*ga*	INDIRECT OBJECT Beneficiary	*ni*	V-*te*	*ageru*
SUBJECT/AGENT Giver	*ga*	INDIRECT OBJECT Recipient Empathy focus	*ni*		*kureru*

SUBJECT/AGENT Benefactor	*ga*	INDIRECT OBJECT Beneficiary Empathy focus	*ni*	V-*te*	*kureru*
SUBJECT Recipient (Empathy focus)	*ga*	AGENT Giver	*ni*		*morau*
SUBJECT Beneficiary Empathy focus	*ga*	AGENT Benefactor	*ni*	V-*te*	*morau*

In light of such complex configuration of grammatical and empathic components of Japanese giving and receiving verbs, the question is how these peculiar properties influence the process of acquisition of the verbs? Which verb has unmarked combination of grammatical and semantic futures, and is the easiest for acquisition? Which verb is especially difficult to acquire?

About grammatical configuration, there is Givon's proposal (Givon 1979, p.58) that the roles of agent and subject tend to coincide in human language; constructions such as passives (and V-*te morau* constructions), which "denote" the agent to other case roles, tend to be marked and infrequent. Thus, we can suppose, that constructions with verbs of giving (of favor), (V-*te*)*ageru* and (V-*te*)*kureru* would be easier for acquisition, than *morau* or V-*te morau* constructions. On the other hand, considering empathy phenomenon, Kuno has proposed several empathy constraints, which reflect general tendencies in the way languages are constructed. There is "surface structure empathy hierarchy", according to which it is easier for the speaker to empathize with the referent of the subject than the referents having other grammatical roles (Kuno 1987, p.211). If we apply this constraint to the giving and receiving verbs, we can assume that constructions with (V-*te*)*ageru* and (V-*te*)*morau* where the subject coincide with empathy focus are unmarked and must be comparatively easily acquired. Considering both the proposals, (V-*te*)*ageru* constructions seem to be unmarked in respect to the both grammatical and empathy constraints.

The findings of the previous studies in the field of first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition of Japanese giving and receiving verbs are consistent with this proposal (Horiguchi 1979, 1984; Okubo 1983; Maeda&Maeda 1983). (V-*te*)ageru constructions are rarely used incorrectly by Japanese children, as well as by Japanese language students (Horiguchi 1984), whereas the other constructions seems to be more difficult to acquire for the both, Japanese children and L2 Japanese students. Horiguchi has explained this phenomenon in the terms of combining in the subject of the verb the role of agent of action and the speaker's point of view (Horiguchi 1979). After her Clancy (1985) has proposed, that

"...constructions with *ageru* may fit a kind of natural prototype: the agent is the subject of the sentence, the subject is the focus empathy, and the speaker is the subject. *Morau* preserves the speaker/subject empathy focus, but is more difficult because the agent is not the subject of the sentence, but the speaker, the most natural focus empathy, must be the indirect object rather than the subject, and cannot be agent. Thus *kureru* departs from the hypothetical prototype more radically than *morau*..." (Clancy 1985, p.412).

In other words, (V-*te*) *kureru* constructions are considered by Clancy as the most difficult for L1 acquisition. However, there are data from L1 acquisition researches, which are not consistent with the Clancy's proposal (Uyeno et al. 1978, Iwabuchi & Muraishi 1968; Harada 1977; Fujiwara 1977). Iwabuchi & Muraishi (1968) and Fujiwara (1977) report that in their data *kureru* constructions in children speech emerged earlier than *morau* constructions. The finding of Uyeno et al. (1978) and Harada (1977) show that children of ages from three-year-old to six-year-old fail to comprehend *morau* and V-*te morau* constructions and frequently misinterpret them. Based upon these data, Numata (1999) has concluded the priority of acquisition of direct grammatical structure where the subject of the sentence is the agent of action, like in (V-*te*)*ageru* and (V-*te*)*kureru* constructions. Numata claims that children first learn how to deal with grammatical structure (namely, they learn to mark agent with *ga* and indirect object with *ni*), and after that they acquire the empathic component of the verbs.

The question arises here is about the universality of cognitive mechanisms of acquiring of Japanese giving and receiving verbs, not only in the case of Japanese children, but also in the case of adult learners of Japanese. Are the mechanisms of acquiring for Japanese students the same as for Japanese children? Do the empathic components of the verbs influence difficulty or easiness of acquisition? Which type of the verbs, the verbs demanding agent as subject ((V-*te*)*ageru* and (V-*te*)*kureru*), or the verbs demanding speaker's point of view as subject ((V-*te*)*ageru* and (V-*te*)*morau*), is easier for L2 acquisition? This question relates to the thesis about unmarked agentive subject of sentence (Givon 1979), as well as the thesis about unmarked empathic subject of sentence (Kuno 1987), both mentioned above, and priority among them. If (V-*te*)*ageru* and (V-*te*)*kureru*, the verbs with direct grammatical structure, where an agent appears as the subject of the sentence, are easier to acquire for Japanese language students, this would implicate that grammatical properties of language constructions influence process of their acquisition by L2 students in the greater degree, than the empathic properties do. If (V-*te*)*ageru* and (V-*te*)*morau* constructions, where the subject coincide with speaker's view point, are easier to understand and use for Japanese students, it would implicate that empathic semantic component do influence L2 acquisition of giving and receiving verbs.

In an attempt to provide the answers for the questions above we have designed the testing

experiment with Russian native speakers aged from 16 to 26 years, who learn Japanese language in their own country. The goal of our study was to determine degree of difficulty among the three Japanese giving and receiving verb constructions in the verb selecting tasks. The verbs in the tasks were in their both basic and auxiliary uses.

Below we discuss our methodology (Section 2) and then we present our findings in Section 3. In section 4 we discuss the implications of these findings and the conclusions we may draw from them.

2. Method

We have tested 85 Russian native speakers who were intermediate Japanese learners, in the written tests. Among the tested Japanese learners 33 were college students, 45 learned Japanese on the commercial courses, and 7 were attending the high school. All learners have studied Japanese for around 300 hours and have completed an elementary course. They have mastered basic Japanese grammar including giving and receiving verb constructions. Their Japanese language ability fit the conditions for Level 3 of Japanese Language Proficiency Test (*Nihongo nouryoku shiken. Shutsudai kijun 2004*).

We have designed 23 Japanese sentences with verbs *ageru* (4 sentences), V-*te ageru* (3 sentences), *kureru* (4 sentences), V-*te kureru* (4 sentences), *morau* (4 sentences), and V-*te morau* (4 sentences). The giving and receiving verbs were missing in the task sentences, and students were required to insert the appropriate verb in the blanks during 40 minutes. The task pages were accompanied by vocabulary, to prevent any misunderstanding of the sentence content.

To solve this task, students were asked to evaluate the grammatical structure of the sentence, identify the empathy focus, and then select the verb. In order to clarify the mechanism of identification of the empathy focus in the sentences we made the subject and indirect object of the task sentences differ in terms of grammatical person characteristics. Table 2 represents these characteristics for each sentence.

Table 2. Grammatical person characteristics for the task sentences.

No.	Subject	Indirect object	Verb
1	1st person	2nd person	*ageru*
2	1st person	3rd person	
3	2nd person	3rd person	
4	3rd person	3rd person	
5	1st person	2nd person	V-*te ageru*
6	1st person	3rd person	
7	2nd person	3rd person	

8	2nd person	1st person	*kureru*
9	2nd person	3rd person	
10	3rd person	1st person	
11	3rd person	3rd person	
12	2nd person	1st person	V-*te kureru*
13	2nd person	3rd person	
14	3rd person	1st person	
15	3rd person	3rd person	
16	1st person	2nd person	*morau*
17	1st person	3rd person	
18	2nd person	3rd person	
19	3rd person	3rd person	
20	1st person	2nd person	V-*te morau*
21	1st person	3rd person	
22	2nd person	3rd person	
23	3rd person	3rd person	

We turn next to our findings.

3. Findings

3.1 Distribution of degree of difficulty

The percentage of correct answers to the verb selecting tasks, averaged from 85 students' results, is presented in Figure 1. We have different distribution of degree of difficulty for the tasks with main and auxiliary verb constructions. The difficulty of the task with main giving and receiving verbs we represent by the hierarchy *ageru* < *morau* < *kureru*, while that with auxiliary verbs we may represent by the hierarchy V-*te ageru* < V-*te kureru* < V-*te morau*. The difference in the acquisition difficulty between two types of the verb constructions was not found in the previous researches, mentioned above.

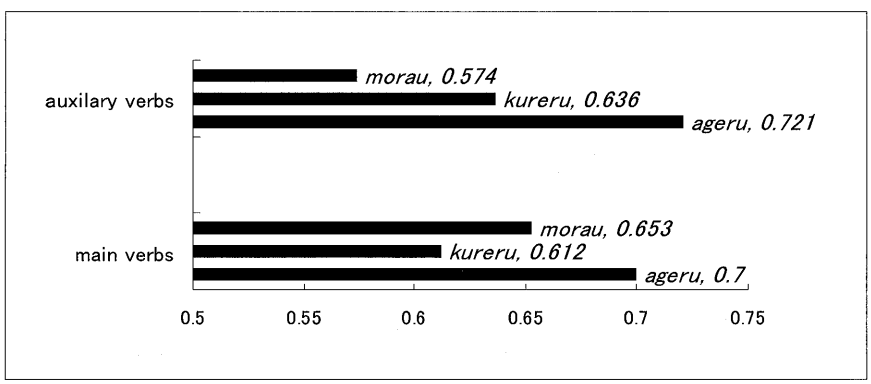

Figure 1. The percentage of correct answers in the verb-selecting test

The results of the test indicate that the tasks with auxiliary verbs constructions were overall significantly more difficult for students to solve than the tasks with main verbs constructions [$t(85)=2.64$, $p<.01$]. Thus, the difference in acquisition difficulty between the main and auxiliary verb constructions was verified statistically in our study.

We also found a statistically significant difference between the percentages of correct answers to tasks with the main verb *morau* and with the auxiliary verb V-*te morau*. Thus, V-*te morau* constructions were significantly more difficult for students than the counterparts with *morau* [$t(85)=2.01$, $p<.05$]. The differences in percentage of correct answers between the other main – auxiliary counterparts were not significant.

We found statistically significant differences between the following five percentages: V-*te morau* and V-*te kureru* [$p<.01$], V-*te morau* and V-*te ageru* [$p<.001$], V-*te kureru* and V-*te ageru* [$p<.05$], *ageru* and *kureru* [$p<.001$], *ageru* and *morau* [$p<.05$]. The difference between percentages of correct answers to the tasks with the main verbs *kureru* (0.612) and *morau* (0.653) in our study was not significant, because of great dispersion in the data.

As Figure 1 shows, the tasks with *ageru* were the easiest in both cases of main and auxiliary verbs. In the case of main verb constructions, *kureru* constructions were more difficult than *morau* constructions on the average, but not significantly. Among the auxiliary verb constructions V-*te morau* constructions were the most difficult for students to solve the tasks.

These findings indicate that it is quite possible that there are two different acquisition mechanisms for main and auxiliary verb constructions, since the tasks with main and auxiliary verbs demonstrate different hierarchies of difficulty. We can assume that combining in the subject the role of agent makes understanding of the construction by students easier in the case of complex sentences, with V-*te* and auxiliary verbs, such as in Japanese benefactive constructions. In the case of simple sentences like Japanese giving and receiving main verb constructions, there is a probability for influencing acquisition difficulty by such factor as empathy structure of the sentence. That is, the sentences with empathy focus in the subject position may be easier for understanding and using by Japanese students, than the sentences with empathy focus in the other positions.

However, it is not clearly enough, how the students identified empathy focus when they solved the tasks. Below we consider how the concrete semantic content of the subject or the indirect object in the sentences with giving and receiving verbs may influences the process of identifying of empathy focus by students.

3.2 Identifying empathy focus

In order to clarify the mechanism of identifying empathy focus in the task sentences

we have analysed the percentages of correct answers in relation to grammatical person characteristics, which can be applied to referent being empathy focus of the sentence.

Table 3. Percentages of correct answers in relation to the empathy focus (N=85)

Subject:	1st person	2nd person	3rd person
ageru	0.788	0.676	0.459
V-*te ageru*	0.778	0.588	No sentences
morau	0.735	0.677	0.471
V-*te morau*	0.588	0.541	0.435
Indirect Object:	**1st person**	**2nd person**	**3rd person**
kureru	0.670	No sentences	0.533
V-*te kureru*	0.729	No sentences	0.541

Table 3 presents the percentages of the correct answers to the task sentences with a different subject and indirect object. We found that the sentences with a first person pronoun in the position of empathy focus were easier to understand for the students, than the sentences with second person in this position. Likely, the task sentences with second person referent being empathy focus demonstrate higher rate of correct answers, than the sentences where third parties were empathy focus. The students easily correlated empathy focus with the first personal pronoun and found difficulty in the identification of the second and especially the third party referents as empathy focus of the sentences[1)].

Japanese giving and receiving verbs reflect the Japanese *uchi/soto* ('in-group/out-group') deictic system, where empathy focus identifies not with the grammatical person but with *uchi* ('in-group') (Wetzel 1994). Our data indicates that the students have the problems with acquisition of Japanese *uchi/soto* system, in which the third person 'in-group' referent like *otooto* ('my little brother') must be treated as empathy focus, if another participant of giving is not considered as the 'in-group' member.

4. Summary and concluding remarks

We have considered the degree of difficulty among six Japanese giving and receiving verbs constructions in the verb selecting test and found the different distribution pattern for the cases of difficulty of main and auxiliary verbs constructions. The results of the test indicate the degree of difficulty among main verbs constructions as shown by hierarchy

(1) *ageru* << *morau* < *kureru*,

where the sign '<' denotes statistically not significant difference in the data, and the sign '<<' denotes statistically significant difference.

The degree of difficulty among the auxiliary verb constructions distributes as

(2) V-*te ageru* < <V-*te kureru* < <V-*te morau*.

Thus, we can conclude that the combining of the role of agent in the subject is crucial for understanding of Japanese benefactive constructions by students. In the case of Japanese giving and receiving main verb constructions the combining of the speaker's point of view in the subject seems to be influencing the understanding of the constructions, although without statistically confirmable evidence the question about unmarkedness of the empathic subject in L2 acquisition of Japanese giving and receiving verbs remains open.

Our findings show that the mechanisms of acquiring Japanese giving and receiving verb constructions are different in the cases of main and auxiliary verbs. The constructions with auxiliary verbs include subordinate clause with V-*te* verb, which expresses some action. The agent of this action is the subject of the sentence in V-*te kureru* and V-*te ageru* constructions, and it is the indirect object in V-*te morau* constructions. The indirect case of the agent in V-*te morau* constructions makes them similar to passive constructions, where the grammatical cases of the agent and the patient are inversed in grammatical case. We suppose that the inverse structure of V-*te morau* construction is the main source of difficulty for L2 students.

In addition, V-*te morau* constructions do not have analogous in the students' first language and most of them cannot be translated to Russian without reconstruction of the grammatical structure. In contrast, the main verb *morau* can be translated to Russian since it has Russian analogue 'получать'('receive'). Thus, the incongruity between L2 and L1 grammatical structures may be the source of special difficulty of V-*te morau* construction, as well as the lexical analogy between L2 and L1 'receive' constructions may be the reason for the relative easiness of *morau* constructions for the L2 students.

Considering the mechanism of identifying empathy focus in the task sentences, we found that the notion 'speaker's point of view', or 'empathy focus' has different content for Japanese and Russian speakers. Unlike Japanese native speakers, our Russian informants were correlating empathic focus mainly with first person referent. These results can be interpreted as a special difficulty of the acquisition of the Japanese *uchi/soto* deictic system by L2 students.

As we have seen in section 3.2, the semantic content of the subject or indirect object in the position of empathy focus does influence the degree of difficulty of the task sentences. For example, the easiest on average tasks with (V-*te*) *ageru* constructions got very low rate of correct answers, if empathy focus in the sentence was represented by second or third person (Table 3).

Therefore, we must reformulate the explanation of the easiness of (V-*te*)*ageru* constructions for L2 acquisition, done by Horiguchi (1984). Horiguchi claims that (V-*te*)*ageru* constructions are comparatively easy for second language acquisition because of combining in the subject the role of agent and the speaker's point of view. Our findings show that identifying of the speaker's point of view in the sentence is not trivial operation for the L2 students, who need to be trained for acquiring of Japanese *uchi/soto* deictic system. Thus, the explanation of acquisition easiness of (V-*te*)*ageru* constructions we reformulate as combining with the subject the role of agent, which represented by *first person pronoun*. Detailed analysis of cross-linguistic differences in content of possible empathy focus of sentence, as well as the question about the role of such factor as speaker's point of view in second language acquisition processes awaits their further investigations.

Notes

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1) These results confirm the Kuno's "speech-act empathy hierarchy" as it was proposed in Kuno&Kaburaki (1975). According to the proposal, there is the tendency for the speakers to emphasize with themselves rather than with hearers, and with hearers rather than with third parties.

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