

## Children's Early Acquisition of Right Dislocation in Japanese

**Introduction:** This study experimentally shows that the acquisition of right dislocation in child Japanese is quite early, contrary to the degraded children's performances reported for similar word order constructions such as cleft constructions.

It has been observed in the literature that Japanese children show difficulty comprehending Japanese cleft constructions (Dansako & Mizumoto 2007, Ohba et al. 2019). In particular, Ohba et al. (2019) observed that Japanese children correctly interpret Object Clefts (OCs)(1a), whereas they incorrectly interpret Subject Clefts (SCs)(1b). In the case of SCs, it seems that they often interpret the first NP as agent and the second NP as patient/theme ("Agent-First Strategy"), since Japanese canonical word order is SOV. Thus, Japanese children incorrectly accepted SCs such as (1b) even when the subject and the object were inverted. This kind of children's non-adult-like behavior was also reported in scrambled (OSV) sentences (Hayashibe 1975, Otsu 1994).

Right Dislocation (RD) in Japanese is a construction quite similar to SC/OC in terms of its word order (OVS/SVO). Examples of Subject RD (SRD) and Object RD (ORD) are given in (2). Sugisaki (2005) and Dansako (2018) observed that children aged 2 produced (S)VO sentences (ORD) and OSV sentences (SRD). Since children produce SRD/ORD spontaneously, they may not have difficulty comprehending SRD/ORD even though the word orders of SRD/ORD are quite similar to those of SC/OC. On the other hand, if children use the Agent-First Strategy when a sentence begins with a patient/theme, they may show non-adult-like performance with SRD as well as SC.

**Experiment:** In order to examine whether Japanese children show difficulty comprehending SRD/ORD as they do SC/OC, we examined 18 children with a TVJT (Crain & Thornton 1998). The subjects were divided into two groups, Group 1 (G1) ( $N = 9$ , 4;8 – 6;7, Mean = 5;7) for SRD/ORD and Group 2 (G2) ( $N = 9$ , 4;7 – 6;6, Mean = 5;5) for SC/OC. The target items for G1 and G2 are (3) and (4). There were four trials for SRD/ORD and SC/OC; two were in true conditions ((3)) and the other two were in false conditions ((4)). In the false conditions, the thematic roles of the subject and object were inverted. To permit comparison with the results in Ohba et al. (2019), we adopted the same experimental method/materials.

**Results and Discussion:** Table 1 summarizes the results of our experiment. In G1, the children showed adult-like performance with OCs, but they did not with SCs. The children incorrectly accepted SCs in spite of the fact that the thematic roles of the subject and the object were inverted. The total correct response rate for OCs was 91.7% (33/36), but that for SCs was only 52.8% (19/36). This result is in line with Ohba et al. (2019), and thus our experiment successfully replicates their study. In contrast to the children's behavior with SC/OC, G2 showed a quite good performance with not only ORD but also SRD. The total correct response rates for SRD and ORD were 86.1% (31/36) and 100% (36/36), respectively. The difference between the performance with SRD and that with SC was statistically significant ( $F(1, 16) = 5.54$ ,  $p = 0.32$ ).

Our results strongly suggest that Japanese children DO NOT show difficulty comprehending SRD or ORD, in contrast to the predictions of the Agent-First Strategy. This provides supporting evidence for the observation by Sugisaki (2005) and Dansako (2018) that the acquisition of right dislocation is quite early.

In contrast to SRD/ORD, the children we tested seem to interpret the first NP in SC as agent. However, if the Agent-First Strategy is based solely on word order, Japanese children should have shown the strategy with not only SC but also SRD, but this was not the case. Therefore, our finding casts doubt on the view that the non-adult-like behavior of SC is only attributable to its word order, namely, the word order in which sentences start with a patient/theme argument.

(1) a. **Object Cleft (OC)**

[ Inu-ga  $t_j$  oikake-teiru no wa] neko(-o)<sub>j</sub> da.  
 dog-Nom chase-Prog C Top cat-Acc Cop  
 ‘It is a cat that the dog is chasing.’

b. **Subject Cleft (SC)**

[  $t_i$  neko-o oikake-teiru no wa] inu(-ga)<sub>i</sub> da.  
 cat-Acc chase-Prog C Top dog-Nom Cop  
 ‘It is a dog that is chasing the cat.’

(2) a. **Subject Right Dislocation (SRD)**

Neko-o oikake-teiru yo, inu-ga.  
 cat-Acc chase-Prog SFP dog-Nom  
 ‘It is chasing a cat, the dog.’

b. **Object Right Dislocation (ORD)**

Inu-ga oikake-teiru yo, neko-o.  
 pig-Nom chase-Prog SFP cat-Acc  
 ‘A dog is chasing (it), the cat.’

(3) **Test Sentence for Group 1 (Clefts):** Example of the Subject Cleft (True)

< Context >

Mite! Dareka-ga koarasan-o oikake-teite, koarasan-ga dareka-o oikake-teiru yo.  
 Look! Someone-Nom koala-Acc chase-Prog koala-Nom someone-Acc chase-Prog SFP  
 ‘Look! Someone is chasing the koala, and the koala is chasing someone.’

< Subject cleft test sentence (SC) >

Koarasan-o oikake-teiru no wa oumasan da yo.  
 Koala-Acc chase-Prog C Top horse Cop SFP  
 ‘It is a horse that is chasing the koala.’



(4) **Test Sentence for Group 2 (RD):** Example of object right dislocation (False)

< Context > Mite! Dareka-ga butasan-o aratte-teite, butasan-ga dareka-o aratte-teiru yo.  
 Look! Someone-Nom pig-Acc wash-Prog pig-Nom someone-Acc wash-Prog SFP  
 ‘Look! Someone is washing the pig, and the pig is washing someone.’

< Object right dislocation test sentence (ORD) >

Butasan-ga aratte-teiru yo, inusan-o.  
 pig-Nom wash-Prog SFP dog-Acc  
 ‘A pig is washing (it), the dog.’



<Results of our experiment>

Table 1: Children’s and adults’ correct response rates for clefts and right dislocation

Types of Test sentences	Subject Clefts (SC)	Object Clefts (OC)	Subject Right Dislocation (SRD)	Object Right Dislocation (ORD)
Word Order	OVS	SVO	OVS	SVO
Children (Cleft: $N = 9$ , RD: $N = 9$ )	52.8% (19/36)	91.7% (33/36)	86.1% (31/36)	100% (36/36)
Adults ( $N = 7$ )	100% (28/28)	100% (28/28)	100% (28/28)	100% (28/28)

**Selected References:** Dansako, M. 2018. *Handbook of the 156th LSJ meeting*, 87-92; Ohba, Sano & Yamakoshi. 2019. *BUCLD43*; Otsu, Y. 1994. *Language Acquisition Studies in Generative Grammar*, 253-264; Sugisaki, K. 2005. *BUCLD29*, 582-591.