

Referring to Cinderella in L2 Japanese: A preliminary study

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Abstract

This study reports how English-speaking learners of intermediate Japanese refer to the subject noun referents previously introduced within a given discourse. Tsuchiya, Yoshimura & Nakayama (2015) and Nakayama, Yoshimura & Tsuchiya (2015) report that English-speaking L2 Japanese learners only rarely used *kanojo* ‘she’ during their telling of the story of *The Little Match Girl*. Instead, we observed a frequent use of null pronouns as well as a positive correlation between language proficiency and a repetitive use of referential nouns. The use of null pronouns, but not *kanojo*, may come from an instructional effect as those learners were taught the null pronominal use earlier than *kanojo*. The current study analyzing the *Cinderella* story in L2 Japanese also finds a more frequent use of null pronouns than referential nouns and *kanojo*, which may indicate the importance of explicit instruction and more exposure to narratives in the target language.

1. Introduction

Japanese native speakers use nominal forms and null pronouns in their narratives in place of overt third-person pronouns such as *kare/kanojo* ‘he/she’, according to Clancy (1980). Inoi (2008) and Sawasaki, Terao & Shirahata (2014) report that Japanese speaking learners of English use more nominal forms than pronouns such as *he/she/they* in their L2 English narration. This is an instance of L1 transfer. Given this we might expect a similar type of L1 transfer to be at work in English speaking L2 Japanese learners’ narration. In such a case, we would expect that the use of third person pronouns such as *kare/kanojo/karera* ‘he/she/they’ would be observed extensively because the null counterparts do not exist in their native language.

However, according to Tsuchiya, Yoshimura & Nakayama (2015), this is not the case. Instead, more null pronouns were observed than overt third-person singular pronouns in the L2 Japanese learners’ stories of *The Little Match Girl*. We also found that the use of null pronouns decreased as the learner’s Japanese language proficiency level went up, getting close to that of the L1 Japanese control group. That is, the repetitive use of referential nouns increased as their skills improved. We attribute this to the effect of instruction as they were taught to use null pronouns since early in their learning of the language.

Moreover, Nakayama, Yoshimura, & Tsuchiya (2015) looked at English-speaking individuals’ telling of the story of *The Little Match Girl* in L1 English and L2 Japanese and found that all L1 English speakers used *she* in their native tongue, but used null pronouns, not *kanojo* in L2 Japanese. We also found some individual differences, but the general trend was similar to the previous findings in Tsuchiya et al. above. It was concluded that more careful exposure to the language is required for the repetitive use of referential nouns as it is not observable at the sentence level, but only at the narrative level.

In this study, we looked at what type of nouns English-speaking learners of Japanese use to refer to the same agent in *Cinderella* stories. We analyzed five English-speaking, intermediate Japanese learners’ *Cinderella* stories in their L2 Japanese in order to see if similar findings to those in Tsuchiya et al. (2015) and Nakayama et al. (2015) would be observed. Unlike the *The Little Match Girl* story, the *Cinderella* story introduces more agents into the narrative, creating more topic and focus shifts in the discourse. Thus, one would expect to encounter more referential nominals as opposed to the third-person female overt pronoun *kanojo* ‘she’ or null pronouns in reference to Cinderella. However, *kanojo* was uttered only once; null pronouns were still used more often than overt pronouns. This finding is consistent with Tsuchiya et al. and Nakayama et al. despite the fact that these two stories are very different.

The organization of the paper is as follows: first, previous studies will be briefly reviewed; then, experimental conditions and results in section 3; and finally, a discussion of results and concluding remarks in section 4.

2. Previous studies

Japanese native speakers do not frequently use the overt third-person pronouns *kare/kanojo*, but instead use null pronouns when keeping track of referents in oral narratives in Japanese.¹ Clancy (1980) reports that no L1 Japanese speakers used third-person pronouns in their narration while looking at a silent film involving multiple characters. In contrast, L1 English speakers used third-person pronouns extensively in English. Clancy suspects that Japanese native speakers in her experiment did not use third-person pronouns in order to avoid inappropriate connotations as the pronouns carry certain presuppositions, such as the existence of a personal relationship between the referent and the speaker (Hinds 1978).

Yanagimachi (2000) reports difficulty in the acquisition of null pronouns with regard to third-person referents, in comparison to first- and second-person referents by English-speaking learners of Japanese. During their retelling of a story from a short video clip with multiple characters, novice-level L2 Japanese learners were unable to use null pronouns as they needed to frequently switch their subjects. (1) is an example of their struggle to have their narrative point of view from a single character while L1 Japanese speakers used null pronouns in the same task by keeping their narrative point of view from a single character with the use of auxiliary verbs such as giving and receiving verbs as in example (2).

(1) Novice-level Japanese learners' frequent subject switch

... *anoo, obaasan, ga, anoo, inu, anoo, akachan ga, daisuki, kedo, soshite,*
 uhm grandma-NOM uhm dog uhm baby-NOM love but then
anoo, anoo, inu ga, anoo, uchi, uchi, e, ano, anoo, anoo, inu ga, sayonara
 uhm uhm dog-NOM uhm home home uhm uhm uhm dog-NOM goodbye
deshita (laugh), kedo, kedo, soshite, anoo, anoo, o, obaasan, ga, anoo, anoo,
 was but but then uhm uhm grandma-NOM uhm uhm
inu ga [o]. anoo, mm, anoo, mimasen, mimasen deshita, soshite, anoo, inu ga,
 dog-NOM uhm uhm not see did not see then uhn
 dog-NOM
anoo, kaerimasu.

¹ Tsuchiya et al.'s (2015) contrast with respect to the use of overt third-person pronouns in English versus null personal pronouns (*pro*) in Japanese is cited below.

(i) a. When John was walking on the street, he saw a burger shop. Because he felt hungry, he stopped by there for a burger.

b. John wa toori o aruiteita toki, (*pro*) hanbaagaa shoppu o mitsukemashita.
 John TOP street ACC was walking when hamburger shop ACC found
 (*pro*) onaka ga suiteita node, (*pro*) tachiyorimashita
 Stomach NOM was hungry because stopped by

In English the third-person pronoun *he* is used three times by referring to *John* while in Japanese, the null pronoun *pro* is used three times for the same purpose. Also see example (6) in the main text.

Abbreviations: ACC: accusative case; GEN: genitive case; NOM: nominative case; PASS: passive; SFP: sentence final particle; TOP: topic marker; Q: question marker.

uhm return

‘... uhm, the grandma, uhm, loves, the dog, uhm, the baby, but, and, uhm, the dog, uhm, uh. The dog said good-bye (laugh), but, but, and, uhm, the grandma, uhm, not see, did not see the dog, and, uhm, the dog, uhm, goes back to [leaves] the house.’

(2) L1 Japanese speaker’s use of a giving verb

samishii omoi o shite, sooji toka, ato shokki arai toka hajimeru n desu

lonely feeling do cleaning and then dish washing and start

kedo, amarinimo kamatte kurenai mon dakara, katteni

but not at all pay attention not give because on his will

iede o, shite shimatte...

run away from home do

‘(the dog) felt lonely, and (the dog) started cleaning and washing the dishes and so on, but, (the couple) did not pay attention to (the dog and he) left the house of his own will, and...’

In contrast to Yanagimachi (2000), in Tsuchiya et al. (2015) and Nakayama et al. (2015) L2 Japanese speakers often used null pronouns when referring to the third-person. These studies explored an L1 transfer possibility. Inoi (2008) reports that no L1 Japanese speakers used Japanese third-person pronouns in his written narrative task, which used a series of family vacation pictures and involved three characters. His participants were instructed to provide their written narration in English with the lead sentence: *A family was talking about what to do next weekend*. A week later, they were instructed to do the same task in Japanese with the equivalent lead sentence: *Aru kazoku ga kondo no shuumatsu nani o shiyoo ka hanashiatte imashita*. As in (3), L1 Japanese speakers used nominal phrases and null pronouns quite often to refer to the characters in the story (Inoi 2008: 98).

(3) L1 Japanese speaker’s narration for the family vacation

Otoosan ga kyanpu ni ikoo to teian shi, soo suru koto ni kimemashita.

Father-NOM camping go that suggest so do decided

Otoosan to musuko-wa tsuri o okaasan wa gohan no junbi o shite imashita.

father and son-TOP fishing-ACC mother-TOP meal-GEN preparation-ACC doing

Tokoro ga okaasan wa gohan o kogashite shimaimashita.

but mother-TOP rice-ACC burned

Kekkyoku resutoran de shokuji o suru koto ni natte shimaimashita.

after all restaurant at meal-ACC do became

‘The father suggested going camping, and [they] decided to do so. The father and son were preparing for fishing, and the mother was preparing a meal. But the mother burned the food. After all, [they/the family] ended up eating at a family restaurant.’

Inoi's Japanese-speaking learners of English showed a tendency to use the same nominal forms repetitively in English, instead of pronouns to refer to the characters, which was different from L1 English speakers who used pronouns more frequently.

However, the tendency for L1 Japanese speakers to avoid third-person pronouns in English seems to be mitigated when the narrative task focuses on a single character for an extended period of time according to Sawasaki et al. (2014). In their study, Japanese-speaking learners of English were instructed to write an English narrative for *Warashibechooja* (The Straw Millionaire) and *The Three Little Pigs* while looking at wordless picture books. Although their report does not provide any examples of narrative scripts, it specifically shows that the third-person pronoun *he* was used more frequently for characters that appeared in the stories for an extended period of time in comparison with other characters.

Because of these two studies, Tsuchiya et al. (2015) looked into whether English-speaking L2 Japanese learners would use *kanojo* frequently when telling the story of *The Little Match Girl*. As mentioned above, L1 transfer was not observed in Tsuchiya et al. (2015). The participants in the study used null pronouns, unlike those in Yanagimachi (2000). Furthermore, their use of null pronouns decreased as their Japanese language proficiency level went up, becoming similar to that of L1 Japanese speakers. For instance, an intermediate low learner in Tsuchiya et al. (2015) produced (4) with a null pronoun.

- (4) *Ano, okane ga nai kara, michi de, matchi o utte imasu.*
 well money-NOM not because road on match-ACC was selling
 '(a girl) was selling matches on the road because (she) had no money.'

The intermediate low learners in the study used null pronouns 83% of the time while the native controls produced them only 38% of the time. The same learners produced referential nouns 14% of the time whereas the native controls of the study used them 67% of the time. As seen in (5) below, the same story uttered by a Japanese native speaker included more referential nouns, which is similar to a trend found in Clancy (1980) and Inoi (2008) as discussed above.

- (5) *Aru tokoro ni matchi o uri-aruite-iru shojo ga imashita. Sono onnanoko wa yuki no furu samui-naka-nano ni hadashi de aruki misuborashii kakko o shite imashita. Aru hi shojo wa matchi o utte-iru to kyoo mo takusann yuki ga furi totemo samui yoru ni narimashita.*
 'There was a girl who was walking around selling matches in a town. That poor girl was walking barefoot even though it was snowing and very cold. One day it was snowing heavily and became a very cold night when the girl was selling matches.....'

The advanced level speakers in Tsuchiya et al. (2015), on the other hand, used a referential noun such as *shojo* 'little girl' to refer to the Little Match Girl and marked the noun with the

Nominative case marker *ga* as in (6). Generally speaking, at higher proficiency levels the Nominative case marker *ga* was employed more often when a character was introduced and a full noun form was used to reintroduce the character after an interruption by another animate subject noun.

- (6) *Demo genki ga nakute onaka mo suitete, ki ga yowaku natte kita-kara,*
 but vigor-NOM not stomach also empty feeling-NOM weak become because
shojo ga chotto yasumi o toroo to omoimashita.
 girl-NOM a bit rest-ACC take that thought
 ‘but because (she) felt weak and hungry, the girl thought that (she) would take a break a bit.

The learners’ repetitive use of referential nouns increased as their language skills improved. However, it seems to take time for them to learn this repetitive use of referential nouns as it is not observable at the sentence level, but only at the narrative level.

Nakayama et al. (2015) looked at the participants’ retellings in L1 English and L2 Japanese and found that all L1 English speakers used *she* in their native tongue, but null pronouns, and not *kanojo*, in L2 Japanese. The results of these two studies on *The Little Match Girl* may come from an instructional effect as these learners were taught the null pronominal use when they began studying Japanese and overt pronouns were not used frequently in the textbook. There were some individual differences, of course, but these studies reported that learners require more exposure to the language in acquiring the repetitive use of referential nouns. Thus, in this study we examine narratives produced by English-speaking learners of intermediate Japanese who used a different textbook.

In sum, previous research shows that L1 Japanese speakers do not use overt third-person pronouns in oral narratives (Clancy 1980) and written narratives (Inoi 2008). Instead, they tend to use nominal phrases and null pronouns. As for L2 Japanese speakers, Yanagimachi’s study shows that the acquisition of null pronouns in reference to third-person characters takes time and is especially difficult for lower-level learners (see also Nakahama 2011).² However, Tsuchiya et al. (2015) and Nakayama et al. (2015) report L2 speakers of Japanese used null pronouns more frequently, and did not use *kanojo* in their stories. The latter two studies showed more repetitive uses of referential nouns as their language proficiency level went up. Although frequency differences in the use of null pronouns exist among these studies, two things are consistent: the infrequent use of *kanojo* and some repetitive use of referential nouns. The current study provides additional data on these points.

² Nakahama (2011) discusses JFL learners’ referent introduction and tracking and reports that lower level learners had limitations, i.e., null pronouns were used about half the frequency used by advanced learners. This trend seems to be different from the one observed in Tsuchiya et al. and Nakayama et al. Her learners also used multiple agents with null pronouns and overt nominals with the use of *-wa* and *-ga*.

3. The present study

This study examines English-speaking learners' use of (pro)nouns to refer to the third-person singular feminine character, Cinderella, in L2 Japanese narratives.

3.1 Participants

A total of five American college-age English-speaking learners of Japanese participated in this study. They were all in the third year (intermediate) Japanese language class (about 350 class contact hours) and were asked to narrate the story of *Cinderella* in Japanese. They had enough time to prepare their story, as this activity was included as a part of the final examination. These students used the Japanese Language Promotion Center (1980) as a textbook.³

3.2 Materials and procedure

Participants were instructed to tell an adult female native speaker of Japanese the story of *Cinderella* in Japanese. This story was chosen for data collection because it was well-known to all learners. The story was not selected particularly for the purpose of the current research, but rather to see how learners narrate the well-known story in Japanese. No picture book or other visual aid was made available to the students. Each participant faced the listener and gave their narration in a quiet room individually. Their narratives were recorded and later transcribed. The current study analyzes these transcriptions.

3.3 Results

Table 1 shows the number of subject nouns observed in the stories by the five speakers. On average, 27.8 out of 33.4 subject nouns referred to human beings. Of them, the name *shinderera* was used 8.2 times in a story on average. Five were used as a new introduction or a reintroduction in the discourse, as in (7).⁴

(7) *Shinderera wa atarashii okaasan to isshoni sumu koto ni narimashita. Kono mamahaha wa futari no musume-san ga imashita. Musume-tachi wa shinderera ni ijimemashita. Shinderera wa itsumo mamahaha ya musume-tachi no dorei no yoo ni hatarakimashita.*⁵

'Cinderella was decided to live with a new mother. This stepmother had two daughters. They bullied Cinderella. She always worked like a slave for the stepmother and her daughters.'

³ Some of these participants may have used Jorden & Chaplin (1969) and Jorden & Chaplin (1976) while others may have used Jorden & Noda (1987) during their two years. The latter textbook was also used by the participants of Tsuchiya et al. (2015) and Nakayama et al. (2015).

⁴ Interestingly, *futari-no musume* 'two daughters' were also referred to as *musume-tachi* 'the daughters' in the second sentence of the same example.

⁵ The second line of the example contains a particle error. "*Shinderera ni*" is supposed to be "*shinderera o*".

Table 1. Numbers and percentages of subject nouns referring to *Cinderella*

	A	B	C	D	E	Average
Total # of subject nouns	34	26	34	28	45	33.4
Total # of human subject nouns	28	25	29	21	36	27.8
Total # of nouns referring to <i>Cinderella</i>	17	11	18	12	13	14.2
# of <i>Cinderella</i>	12	7	6	4	12	8.2
# of <i>Cinderella</i> in a new turn (%)	5 (29%)	4 (36%)	5 (28%)	3 (25%)	8 (62%)	5 (35%)
# of <i>Cinderella</i> referring to previous <i>Cinderella</i>	7 (41%)	3 (33%)	1 (6%)	1 (8%)	4 (31%)	3.2 (23%)
# of null pronouns referring to <i>Cinderella</i>	5 (29%)	4 (36%)	11 (61%)	8 (67%)	1 (8%)	5.8 (41%)
# of <i>kanojo</i> 'she'	0	0	1 (6%)	0	0	0.2 (1%)

On the other hand, the overt third-person singular female pronoun *kanojo* was uttered only once by one learner, out of the 139 human nouns at the subject position produced by five speakers. Its use was to shift the focus from another character to Cinderella, as in (8).

- (8) *Paatei dewa purinsu-san wa shinderera o mimashita. Kanojo wa kirei desune.*
 party at prince-TOP Cinderella-ACC looked at she-TOP pretty is-SFP
 'At the reception the prince looked at Cinderella. She was pretty.'

As opposed to *kanojo*, null pronouns were used to refer to Cinderella, who had already been introduced in the discourse 5.8 times on average per story. *Shinderera* was repeatedly used 3.2 times per story on average, more often than *kanojo*. (9) is an example of the use of a null pronoun.

- (9) *Shinderera dake ikukoto dekimasendeshita kedo [pro] ikitakattandesu.*
 Cinderella only go fact could not did but go wanted
 'It was only Cinderella who could not go, but she wanted to go.'

Although the average frequency of each nominal is as stated above, it is worth mentioning that two learners (A and E in Table 1) used *shinderera* more often than null pronouns to refer to Cinderella, who was already introduced in the discourse. However, Learner E's case may be related to the fact that she used more subject nouns when referring to those other than Cinderella. Therefore, she may have also used *shinderella* more often than null pronouns. She also employed a storytelling technique using a focus on a question with a reverse order as in (10).

(10) *Futari no ane wa totemo yorokobimashita. Shinderera mo ikitakatta node mamahaha wa yurushimasendeshita. Dansu no yoru ga kita toki ni futari no ane wa ikimashita. Shinderera wa totemo kanashikatta. Totsuzen shinderera wa henna obaasan [ni] aimashita. Dare desuka? Shinderera wa kikimashita. Watashi wa anata no ii obaasan desu. Obaasan [wa] kotaeta...*⁶

'The two (step)sisters were very pleased. Cinderella wanted to go, too, but the stepmother did not allow it. When the reception night came, the two (step)sisters left. Cinderella was very sad. Suddenly she met a strange old lady. "Who are you?" Cinderella asked. "I am your good godmother." The godmother replied.

She used the direct quotation "Who are you?" with "Cinderella asked." Then, she used the first person pronoun for the godmother. This kind of storytelling technique is the same in both English and Japanese. Because of this kind of narrative technique, it is unclear if this student was in the process of mastering the repetitive referential nouns in the discourse. More stories from L2 learners need to be analyzed to come to a firm generalization, but at the very least we can conclude that all learners of this level still used more null pronouns, not *kanojo*, to refer to Cinderella, when previously introduced in the discourse. This finding is consistent with the results of Tsuchiya et al. (2015) and Nakayama et al. (2015).

4. Discussion

Our results show the following. (i) L2 intermediate Japanese speakers demonstrated only a single use of *kanojo*. (ii) Null pronouns were used more often than *kanojo* by all participants, and more often than *shinderera* 'Cinderella' by three speakers. (iii) There were individual differences in the repetitive use of referential nouns (e.g., *shinderera*) among the five speakers (i.e., two learners used *shinderera* more often than null pronouns). (iv) The full referential noun *shinderera* was used more frequently than both types of pronouns after another person appeared in the discourse.

As in Tsuchiya et al. (2015) and Nakayama et al. (2015), we would expect frequent use of overt personal pronouns in Japanese L2 learners' narration if L1 transfer were observed in L2

⁶ The particles in the brackets were erroneously omitted by the learner.

learners' performance. However, no such L1 transfer was observed in this study, which is contrary to the conclusions of Inoi (2008) and Sawasaki et al. (2014). This finding, listed as Result (i) above, is similar to what was observed in Tsuchiya et al. (2015) and Nakayama et al. (2015) despite the fact that the participants of the current study used a different textbook from theirs. Here we wonder if we can consider the null pronominal use to be a case of L1 transfer. That is, they register null pronouns to be Japanese counterparts to English pronouns as they had explicit instruction on the use of null pronouns. If this is correct, the similarity found in Tsuchiya et al., Nakayama et al., and the current study may be due to the instructional effect and L1 transfer. That is to say, negative effects of explicit instruction were observed in their behavior as they were taught “pro-drop” from early in their learning of the Japanese language and they made over-applications. Since the repetitive pronominal use takes place in their L1 English, this L1 knowledge was transferred to L2.⁷ In that case, they consider *kanojo* not to be a pronoun, but something else. Also in this “L1 transfer” interpretation, how we treat the repetitive referential noun is an issue, i.e., whether it is a referentially dependent noun like a pronoun. In any event, it is noteworthy here that the comparable intermediate learners in Tsuchiya et al. (2015) and Nakayama et al. (2015) produced more null pronouns (41%) than the participants in this study (23%) on average. This may be related to Result (iv) above, in that the story of *The Little Match Girl* focused on one person, the Little Match Girl, while the story of *Cinderella* has multiple characters whose activities are described. Therefore, as Tsuchiya et al. correctly predicted, the story of *The Little Match Girl* provided more straightforward referentially dependent contexts, i.e., fewer focus shifts.

Regarding individual differences in Result (iii), Nakayama et al. (2015) also found a variation among native speakers' use of pronouns and referential nouns. A L1 Japanese senior high school student used *kanojo* 56% of the time, compared to null pronouns and referential nouns 58% and 14% of the time, respectively, when referring to the Little Match Girl while the other two Japanese natives used both null pronouns and referential nouns at about the same frequency (46-7% of the time). An example by this high school student is illustrated below in (11).

- (11) *Soko de kanojo wa okaasan ni aitai to omoinagara macchi o surimashita.*
 then she-TOP mother-DAT see want that thinking match-Acc lit
 ‘Then, she lit her match while thinking that she wanted to see her mother.’

Because this tendency concerns frequency, there are naturally individual differences even among the native speakers. Since L2 learners are still learning this repetitive referential noun use from narratives, there may be more room for individual variation.

⁷ The term “repetitive pronominal use” may sound misleading, but here it is used only in contrast with the “repetitive referential noun” use, and it merely depicts a tendency phenomenon.

Intermediate L2 Japanese speakers learn the use of null pronouns at the individual sentence level and in conversation, but they have not had enough opportunities to learn Japanese narrative structures in storytelling. Therefore, it is not unusual at all for us to observe the use of null pronouns and fewer uses of referential nouns in their stories. It takes time for them to learn the repetitive use of referential nouns in Japanese because the acquisition of narrative structures depends on the amount of exposure that each individual receives. Finally, the current study had a few learners of only one proficiency level, so more learners of different levels need to be studied as in Tsuchiya et al. (2015) in the future research.

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