

Characteristics of the Written Narratives of Intermediate Japanese Language Students*

Hiromi Muranaka, University of Western Sydney
h.muranaka@uws.edu.au

Abstract

Some aspects of narratives are language-specific and it takes time to reach a native-like level for a Japanese language learner. This study investigates which features of narrative writing would be difficult for intermediate students of Japanese language to master by testing students studying a fourth year level language subject at an Australian university.

The framework of this investigation is based on the work done by Minami (2008), who found several common features in “good” Japanese stories by examining Japanese oral narratives told by Japanese-English bilingual children. According to Minami’s study, good Japanese stories contained the following features; 1) reasonable length, 2) a large and varied vocabulary, 3) use of the past tense, 4) narration of events in chronological order, 5) use of passive forms, and 6) accurate subject-referential markings.

This study found that the learners could use some language-specific features of Japanese narratives without learning them in the classroom setting, such as use of the past tense and passive forms, which bore similarities to the performance of native speakers. On the other hand, some rather basic grammatical features introduced in the first or second year of their Japanese studies were still difficult to use at the intermediate level; examples of this include sentence types and subject-referential markings.

Thus, for learners of Japanese, the application of basic grammar in the writing of narratives appears to be most difficult to master, and that may or may not be detected in simple grammar tests.

Keywords

Japanese language, Second language learning, intermediate level, narrative development

1. Introduction

Creating a long, meaningful, well-structured story may not be easy, even for a native speaker, and is even more difficult for learners of foreign languages. There appear to be some common features in

* This paper was presented to the 18th Biennial Conference of the Japanese Studies Association of Australia at the Australian National University from 8th to 11th July 2013 and has been peer-reviewed and appears on the Conference Proceedings website by permission of the author who retains copyright. The paper may be downloaded for fair use under the Copyright Act (1954), its later amendments and other relevant legislation.

“good” stories, but these features are not all language-universal, and additional language-specific features also need to be learned.

This study investigates typical features that can be found in the narratives produced by students of Japanese language who were studying at the equivalent of the fourth year level at an Australian university by comparing these narratives to those produced by native Japanese speakers. The bases for this comparison are the features that “good” Japanese stories should contain as suggested by Minami (2008). This study identifies the most difficult components of the Japanese language for students writing narratives at the intermediate level.

2. Features of “good” Japanese stories

Minami (2008) investigated the characteristics of stories considered to be good by comparing the differences between Japanese and English narratives produced by 40 English-Japanese bilingual children aged 6-12 in the US. The material used to elicit the narratives was a wordless picture book called “*Frog, Where are You?*” (Mayer 1969), which contains 24 pictures. The English and Japanese narratives elicited from the participants were rated by 16 native speakers of Japanese and 16 native English speakers respectively. The rating scheme was based on the following six aspects using a 10-point scale: 1) coherence, 2) flow, 3) clear introduction of characters and settings, 4) clear presentation of the main characters’ actions, 5) clear presentation of peripheral characters’ actions, and 6) appropriateness of sentence length.

In Japanese, particles or postpositions following an NP (noun phrase) or ellipsis play important roles in creating a cohesive story, including how protagonists are introduced, maintained and reintroduced in the story. The most basic rules for the Japanese referential system used in narratives follow the pattern in the example below (Hinds 1984). For instance, when a referent is introduced as a common noun such as ‘a boy’:

- 1) *Ga* is used for the first mention,
- 2) *Wa* is used for the second mention,
- 3) Ellipsis is used for subsequent mentions.

These sets of particles and the notion of subject ellipsis are introduced in the first year of Japanese language courses, and are a familiar feature of the Japanese language. However, this three-step pattern is not always strictly followed (Hinds 1984; Watanabe 1990), and it requires a sophisticated appreciation of the nuances of Japanese in order to use the pattern in a native-like manner. This basic pattern can be disregarded for a number of reasons, such as referent and topic shift (Hinds 1984), changes in temporal and physical setting (Clancy & Downing 1987; Nakamura 1993) or for syntactic or pragmatic reasons such as emphasis (Nakamura 1993) and grammatical constraints such as the use of subordinate clauses (Clancy & Downing 1987). Moreover, there also seem to be certain flexibilities within the Japanese language, e.g., when there is no cause for confusion, the second step above – the use of *wa* – may be skipped and the referent marked by ellipsis (Hinds 1984).

Minami (2008) concluded that in either English or Japanese, good stories contain the following characteristics: 1) lengthy stories, 2) large and varied vocabulary, 3) told in the past tense, and 4) narration of events in chronological order.

However, there are also language-specific issues; in English, Minami (2008) considered it important to provide the listener with evaluative descriptions, such as the storyteller's personal comments or thoughts regarding a protagonist, a place, an object or an event during the story-telling. Conversely, in Japanese there is less emphasis on such issues. On the other hand, in Japanese, it is considered important to use passive forms effectively and to use subject-referential markers to support a clear chronological sequence of events (Minami 2008).

A fundamental difference between Minami's study and the current study is the participants. Minami's study investigated bilingual children whose parents were both Japanese or whose mothers were Japanese, whereas this study deals with second language learners who were studying Japanese in a classroom setting. This fundamental difference could lead to different expectations, such as the level of vocabulary required for story-telling or the nature of the participants' language experience; bilingual children could be expected to be more familiar with the structural characteristics of Japanese folktales, having heard such stories read from a young age.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

A total of 16 students participated in this study; nine were native Japanese students studying a variety of courses at an Australian university and seven were non-native Japanese students who were studying the Japanese language in an Australian university.

The non-native Japanese students were taking an (upper) intermediate Japanese subject when the data was collected. This language subject was equivalent to a fourth year Japanese language subject in an Australian university, in which students are expected to have completed at least an equivalent of three years of study at university level. Many students at this level have also completed two to five years of Japanese study in high school and two additional years at university. Therefore, the students were expected to have covered all the grammatical basics and to have had some experience in writing compositions on a variety of topics in Japanese. None of these students had been to Japan for formal education and all had studied the language in a classroom setting. Most students were Japanese language majors, except for one who was taking Japanese as a sub-major. Of the seven non-Japanese participants, four spoke English as their native tongue and three came to Australia after establishing another first language (one Mandarin Chinese and two Indonesian speakers). However, all seven had a command of English sufficient for study at university level and were long-term residents of Australia.

3.2 Material and Analytical Procedure

This study used the same elicitation material used by Minami (2008), the wordless picture book, ‘*Frog, Where are You?*’ (Mayer 1969), to control for the good story criteria suggested by Minami. The participants were asked to look through the book, and then write a story in Japanese in 15 minutes. There were 24 pictures in the picture book and the participants were instructed to write in Japanese using any knowledge that they had previously acquired without using any supporting materials such as dictionaries.

Some types of narrative are more difficult than others (Aksu-Koç, Nelson, & Johnson 2001; Berman 2001, 2004; Berman & Slobin 1994), due to the expected style, vocabulary and structure. The task employed in this study is considered difficult, as it requires story structure and cohesive devices in order to tell a long story that is not based on personal experience.

This study tested the following outcomes from Minami (2008) as to what good Japanese stories commonly consist of, and compares these features between the narratives produced by the Japanese and non-Japanese participants:

- 1) Inclusion of passive voice
- 2) Tense (whether it was told in the past tense)
- 3) Cohesion (how the subject was introduced, maintained and reintroduced)
- 4) Evaluative descriptions.

Length of stories and volume of vocabulary were not tested, as the learners’ writing speed was about half that of a native speaker on average. Within the given 15 minutes, the Japanese speakers wrote 25.4 clauses on average, covering 10.8 pictures out of 24, whereas the non-Japanese students wrote 9.7 clauses on average, covering 4.9 pictures. The sentences were investigated at word and clause levels, in order to analyse complexity, verb form types and sentence structure.

Therefore, the data was initially coded at clause and word levels. Then verb forms, sentence types and cohesion devices were also coded:

- 1) Verb forms
 - a. Past or non-past tense
 - b. Progressive
 - c. The passive voice
 - d. Negative form
- 2) Sentence types
 - a. Simple sentence
 - b. Compound sentence
 - c. Compound-complex sentence
 - d. Complex sentence
- 3) Cohesive devices
 - a. Referent type (e.g. a full noun phrase or ellipsis)
 - b. Particles used for the first mention, second mention, subsequent mention and re-introduction of referents (i.e. the grammatical particles: *ga* and *wa*, particle omissions and incorrect particles)

As this study employed written rather than spoken narratives, the participants had more time to sort out the narrative content and they also had the opportunity to correct their writing. In spoken narrative elicitation tasks, such corrections are impossible. As such, written narratives may be more suitable than casual speech for investigation of cohesion, as grammatical particles that play the principal role in cohesion are less likely to be omitted in written text.

4. Analysis

4.1 Sentence Types

The four sentence types used in the analysis were 1) simple, 2) compound, 3) compound-complex, and 4) complex sentences. The relative proportions of these sentence types are shown in Figure 1, and as can be seen, the most noticeable difference was the use of simple sentences. The non-Japanese participants used this type of sentence almost twice as frequently as the Japanese participants; that is, 63.5% of sentences in the non-Japanese participants narratives were simple sentences, whereas only 33.9% of the Japanese participants' sentences were simple sentences.

A more interesting finding, however, is that the non-Japanese participants' use of compound sentences was limited. The proportion of simple compound sentences and compound-complex sentences was over 30% among the native participants, whereas the non-native participants' data contained only 14.3% of these types of sentence.

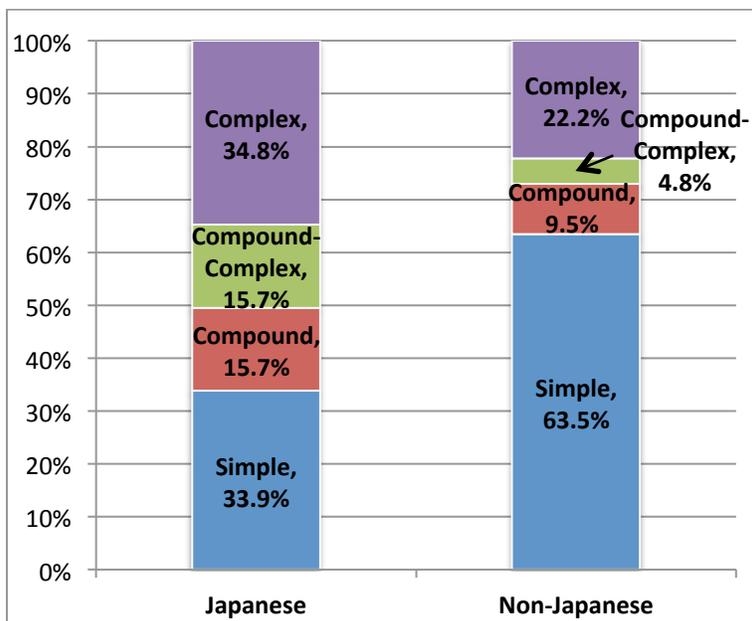


Figure 1. Sentence Types and Participants

The infrequent use of compound sentences by the non-Japanese participants was not expected, as the grammatical structures (such as the verb *te*-form or gerund form) and conjunctions (such as *ga*,

“but”) required for this sentence structure are generally taught early, at the first year level in Australian universities. Below is an example of a compound sentence used by a non-Japanese participant.

Ex. CL1: すぐ、田中くんはふくをきて、
Sugu, Tanaka-kun wa huku o kite,
Immediately, Tanaka put on a cloth, and
CL2: 犬くんがカエルのにおいを見つけてみた。
Inu-kun ga kaeru no nioi o mitsukete mita.
the dog tried to find the smell of the frog.

The use of complex sentences (combining both simple complex sentences and compound-complex sentences) was a predominant feature of the Japanese participants’ data (50.5%, in comparison to 27% for the non-Japanese). The following is an example of a complex sentence created by a non-Japanese participant.

Ex. CL1: ある夜、アルフレドとブラウンがねてるときに、
Aru yo, Aruhuredo to Buraun ga nete ru toki ni,
One night, when Alfred and Brown were sleeping,
CL2: グリーンはビンから出ていた。
Guriin wa bin kara dete ita.
Green was getting out of the jar.

The above result indicates that although the non-Japanese participants were able to use compound and complex sentences, the frequency of these more advanced sentences was lower than the native speakers’ average. Moreover, compound sentences were used less often than complex sentences.

4.2 Inclusion of Passive Voice

Minami (2008) indicated that the use of passive voice was a reliable indicator of a good story in Japanese. However, the results of this study did not validate a high rate of passive voice usage among the Japanese participants. Only two of the nine Japanese participants used the passive voice in their stories, although this study used the same material as Minami’s investigation. The number of passive clauses found in the Japanese participants’ stories was only 0.6 clauses per story, i.e. on average, less than one passive voice clause was used per story. Below is an example found in the Japanese participants’ data;

Ex. CL1: 木の中を探していたら、
Ki no naka o sagashite itara,
While (he) was looking for (the frog) in (the hollow of) the tree,

CL2: フクロウに怒られる一方、
Hukuroo ni okorareru ippoo,
while (he) **was scolded** by an owl,

In the case of the non-Japanese participants, no passive voice clauses were found in their stories, despite the fact that four of the seven participants were native speakers of English (which uses the passive voice commonly) and the rest were fluent English speakers. As the non-Japanese participants were able to utilise only 3-16 pictures out of 24 during the given time, they might have forgone the opportunity to use the passive voice in later pictures. Therefore the pictures in which the Japanese participants used the passive voice were examined. The two Japanese participants who used the passive voice used it in different pictures. One participant used the passive voice in Picture 2 and the other used it in Pictures 10 and 15 and twice in Picture 12. Only six out of nine Japanese and none of the non-Japanese wrote beyond Picture 10. However, only one Japanese participant used the passive voice beyond this picture, while all the Japanese and non-Japanese participants wrote beyond Picture 2, but only a single Japanese participant used the passive voice to describe Picture 2. This suggests that the use of passive voice in a Japanese story is due to personal preference, and story-tellers have a significant degree of freedom in its use. Moreover, the use of the passive voice does not seem to be very common although it might be regarded as an indicator of a good story when it is used.

In the case of non-Japanese participants, the difficulty of using the passive voice in Japanese may also be a factor, as it requires the conjugation of verbs. Although the non-Japanese participants were already familiar with passive voice constructions, verb conjugation could well be a reason for the lack of passive voice in their stories.

4.3 Tense

Clauses which carry tense (past or non-past) were also examined. In order to restrict the data only to the clauses that carry tense, direct speech, which almost always uses the non-past form, and incomplete clauses/sentences with omitted predicates were excluded. Sentences which end with a NP or *taigendome* were also eliminated from the data, as these sentences do not have an overt predicate. Finally, clauses such as subordinate clauses that do not carry tense, and compound sentences joined with the gerund form or the *te*-form of a verb with no tense information were also eliminated. Therefore, most sentences used in the tense analyses had only one clause per sentence.

In Minami's study (2008), it was argued that people rate the use of the past tense as an indicator of a good story. However, the use of the past tense was found in only 66.7% of the clauses in the narratives told by the Japanese participants, i.e. one in three of the analysed clauses was in the non-past form. In the case of the non-Japanese participants, 53.8% of the clauses were in the past tense. Mixing past and non-past forms in a narrative is a common phenomenon in Japanese (Makino 2011), and it is not expected for Japanese to tell a story using only the past tense.

Every participant in this study used both the past and non-past verb forms to tell the story, except for one Japanese participant who used only the past tense throughout the story. This analysis

suggested that the Japanese participants maintained the use of the past tense slightly more consistently compared to the non-Japanese participants.

A potential explanation could be found in the relationship between tense and verb forms, and therefore direct speech/interjections, progressive, copula, negative and other verb forms were investigated. This analysis indicated that the verb forms determine the tense to a significant extent in Japanese, and therefore the story can be told using both the past and non-past tense, although the story itself was clearly meant to describe a past event.

	Progressive		Copula		Negative		Others	
	Non-Past	Past	Non-Past	Past	Non-Past	Past	Non-Past	Past
Japanese	8	4	6	2	11	0	4	58
Non-JP	2	0	3	0	3	1	3	20

Table 1. The Number of Clauses in the Past and Non-Past Tense

Table 1 provides a summary of the relationship between verb forms and the use of past and non-past tenses. In short, verb forms seemed to influence the use of the past tense; clauses that used progressive verbs, copula and negative verbs tended to be in the non-past tense, whereas the other verb forms were used in past tense clauses.

One very clear indication is that negative clauses were almost always in the non-past form. This was especially consistent among the Japanese participants, as all of their negative clauses were in the non-past form.

Both Japanese and non-Japanese participants tended to use the non-past tense for clauses ending with a copula and for progressive clauses. Although progressive and negative forms in the past tense were longer and more complex than the non-past tense equivalents (e.g. “*mite imashita*” was looking vs “*mite imasen deshita*” was not looking), the copula does not require complex conjugation in the past tense (i.e. *desu* (non-past) becomes *deshita* (past)). Thus it does not seem to be the difficulty of the form itself that determined the choice between the past and non-past tenses. In the case of the copula, as *desu* (non-past) is used much more frequently than *deshita* (past) especially in the first year, lack of familiarity with the past tense *deshita* could be the reason for the more frequent use of *desu*.

Below is an example of the use of a negative sentence (Clause 1) and a progressive form (Clause 2) written in the non-past tense by a non-Japanese participant.

Ex. CL1: 家でどこでもいません。
Uchi de doko de mo imasen. (non-past, negative)
 (Should be “*Uchi no doko ni mo imasen*”).
 (It) is nowhere in the house.

CL2: トムーは外にかえるをよんでいます。
Tomuu wa soto ni kaeru o yonde imasu. (non-past progressive)

(Should be “*Tomu wa soto **de** kaeru o yonde imasu*”.)

Tom is calling the frog outside.

Other types of clauses were predominantly in the past tense among both the native and non-native Japanese participants.

To summarise, certain verb forms such as negative and progressive, as well as the copula in Japanese, tend to be told in the non-past form, while it is still the norm for non-copular, non-negative and non-progressive clauses to be in the past tense. Although the story was definitely told as a past event by the participants, it is not the norm to tell a whole story using the past form in Japanese. Some forms of verbs or the use of a predicate have the option of being told in the non-past tense, and the Japanese and non-Japanese participants in this study showed similarities in the use of the past and the non-past tense.

4.4 Cohesion

In Japanese, text cohesion has been identified as one of the important factors in maintaining a story in chronological order (Minami 2008). In order to achieve a coherent story, referent introduction (first mention), maintenance (second mention and subsequent mentions), and re-introduction and its marking (ellipsis and grammatical particles) are used, and these aspects were investigated in the participant’ stories. As the stories produced were rather short, only the main protagonist’s referential system, which involved the longest sequence of cohesive text, was examined.

	1 st Mention				2 nd Mention			
	<i>Ga</i>	<i>Wa</i>	<i>EL</i> ¹	<i>Others</i>	<i>ga</i>	<i>wa</i>	<i>EL</i>	<i>Others</i>
Japanese	2	7	0	0	1	1	5	0
Non-JP	0	3	1	3 (incorrect)	0	0	1	1 (omission)
	Subsequent Mentions				Re-Introductions			
	<i>ga</i>	<i>Wa</i>	<i>EL</i>	<i>Others</i>	<i>ga</i>	<i>wa</i>	<i>EL</i>	<i>Others</i>
Japanese	2	4	38	1 (omission)	0	27	13	0
Non-JP	0	1	5	1 (incorrect)	3	4	2	6 (incorrect)

Table 2. Referential Markings by Japanese and Non-Japanese Participants

Overall, there were some differences between the Japanese and non-Japanese participants in their markings of the main protagonist. The Japanese participants had a strong tendency to use the particle *wa* (39 out of 102 particles used or 38.2%) and ellipsis (57 out of 102 or 55.9%) to mark the main protagonist referent. As their stories were longer, they had more opportunities to make subsequent mentions, where ellipsis is a common choice, and to use re-introductions, where the particle *wa* is therefore the most expected choice (Hinds 1984).

¹ Note: EL = ellipsis

The Japanese speakers' referential marking data were as expected. The first mention referents were marked with *ga* if the referent was a common noun (phrase) (2 out of 9 Japanese participants), and marked by *wa* if the referent was a proper noun (7 out of 9), suggesting the existence of shared knowledge (e.g. If introduced as "*John*", *John* is the boy who is assumed to be doing an action in the story, so no explanation is required). For the second mention, only 7 out of 9 Japanese participants employed a second mention of the main protagonist.

The Japanese participants' use of *ga* (1 out of 7) or ellipsis (5 out of 7) occurred more than the expected *wa* (only 1 out of 7). This was due to grammatical constraints (i.e. *ga* being used to mark the subject in a subordinate clause) or when ellipsis was used following a proper noun subject which was marked by *wa* in the first mention.

The non-Japanese participants' referential markings were fundamentally similar to those of the Japanese participants. About two-thirds of the examples in this study fell into this category. The conditions under which the expected patterns were altered were the use of *ga* if a referent was in a subordinate clause, or when the referent was clearly identifiable from the predicate or the sentence structure, such as a compound sentence.

There were two major differences between the non-Japanese and Japanese participants in terms of the referential markings of the main protagonist; one of the 7 non-Japanese participants used ellipsis exclusively throughout the story to refer to the main protagonist, and some other non-Japanese participants' use of grammatical particles and ellipsis were incorrect.

Looking at each of these differences, we first turn to the one non-Japanese participant who used only ellipsis to refer to the main protagonist. This means that the subject was always omitted from the first mention. This type of referential pattern for the main protagonist is commonly observed among young native Japanese children, and other languages also have similar patterns, i.e. the main protagonist is marked with a more attenuated linguistic form such as a pronoun in English or an ellipsis in Japanese (Bamberg 1987; Hickmann & Hendriks 1999; Karmiloff-Smith 1992; Wigglesworth 1990). However, it would be unexpected to find such a pattern among adult native Japanese speakers, especially in written language, although in this particular case it was clear which protagonist the participant was referring to.

Secondly, errors associated with the use of particles were also clearly observed in the data. Ten out of 31 referential markings involved the incorrect usage of particles. This means that one in three usages of referential markings were incorrect, which could cause misunderstanding or uncertainty as to who the agent is. Two main types of error were found; interchanging *wa* and *ga*, and the use of non-subject marking particles in the place of *wa* or *ga*.

Many errors were due to the incorrect usage of *wa* in place of *ga*, and vice versa, which is a common error and is also understandable as both forms can be used to mark a NP appearing in the subject position. The fundamental reason for this type of error is that the participant does not apply the grammatical rule associated with the subordinate clause where the subject needs to be marked by *ga*, or that the participant confuses the system governing new and old information, *ga* versus *wa*. Below is an example of the use of *wa* instead of *ga*. This is the first mention of the protagonist, and the subject common noun, *aru kodomo* (a child) should be marked by *ga*, which marks new information in a story.

Ex. ちいさいあるの子供は新しいペートが買いました。
Chiisai aru no kodomo wa atarashii peeto ga kaimashita.
(Should be “*Chiisai aru kodomo ga atarashii petto o kaimashita*”.)
A little child bought a new pet.

Another equally common error found in the data was the use of particles such as *ni* (indirect object), *no* (possessive), *o* (object) and *to* (committative) in the subject position, where either *ga* or *wa* should appear. In these cases, some statements do not make any sense, as it is difficult to determine who the agent is.

Below is an example of the use of *o* (object marker) in the place of *ga* (subject marker).

Ex. CL1: あるの晩は、子供と犬をねる時、
Aru no ban wa kodomo to inu o neru toki,
(Should be *Aru ban, kodomo to inu ga nete iru toki,*)
One night, when a child and a dog (were) sleep(ing),
CL2: かえるはかびんから出たしまいました。
Kaeru wa kabin kara detta shimaimashita.
(Should be “*Kaeru wa bin kara dete shimaimashita*”.)
the frog had gotten out of the vase (should be a jar).

If errors are pointed out, the non-Japanese participants may be able to correct them. However, at this stage of language acquisition, it still seems difficult for the non-Japanese participants to apply their knowledge in practice. This is especially the case when they are asked to write a narrative rather than answering short grammar questions (e.g. in a classroom test).

4.5 Evaluative Descriptions

Minami (2008) identified evaluative descriptions as important features of good English narratives. In contrast, Japanese places less emphasis on such types of information. As all the non-Japanese participants were English-medium-educated, it was hypothesised that these participants would use more evaluative descriptions in their narratives than the Japanese participants.

Out of the 9 Japanese participants, 7 participants used some type of evaluative clause. Out of 231 clauses used by the Japanese participants, 5.2% of the clauses contained some type of evaluative description. This indicates that even though these types of statements are not considered to be the most important part of a good story in Japanese, most of the Japanese participants included one or two such clauses in their stories.

Conversely, out of 68 clauses used by the non-Japanese participants, 13.2% of the clauses fell into the category of evaluative description. However, only 4 out of 7 participants used at least one evaluative clause. The reason for the higher percentage of evaluative clauses among the non-native participants was that one student with an English native background used a high percentage of such clauses.

Therefore, it was not necessarily the norm for the non-Japanese participants to use a markedly greater degree of evaluative description in comparison to the Japanese participants. No clear link was found between the use of evaluative description and the native-language background of the participants. Both Japanese and non-Japanese participants generally told the story with a small proportion of such clauses in Japanese.

5. Discussion and conclusion

There are some features of “good” stories that are highly language-specific. By the time learners of Japanese have completed 3-7 years of study in a classroom setting, they should be able to produce stories with some of the features of good Japanese stories.

Some interesting features observed in this investigation concerned the use of the passive voice and the use of tense. Without specifically learning how to write a Japanese story, learners at this level used the passive voice at a similar rate to the Japanese participants (i.e. very little). Furthermore, their use of the past or non-past form reflected types of verb form similar to those used by the Japanese participants, i.e. they used the non-past form for a negative clause in spite of the fact that it was a past event. This was unexpected, as in English, past events are told in the past tense in Japanese, and students are generally not taught how to write a story in Japanese to this level of detail.

Two major differences found between the Japanese and non-Japanese participants were related to sentence types and referential markings. Although the non-Japanese participants had learned all of the necessary grammar to create compound and complex sentences in Japanese, many participants did not use them. They tended to use simple sentences instead. Another prominent difference was the use of referential markings in Japanese, which require the use of grammatical particles. Even though the Japanese learners had been learning particles from the beginning of their Japanese language studies, it seems to be one of the most difficult aspects of the language to master. This was apparent not only in the differences between the use of *wa* and *ga*, both of which appear in the subject position, but also in the use of other particles such as the object marker which was used instead of the subject marker *ga*.

It has been reported that in first language acquisition, many features of narrative co-develop (Severing & Verhoeven 2001), for example, when children gradually start producing longer narratives, more complex features start emerging. In second language learning, although some features such as verb forms may be already similar to those of adult Japanese native speakers, other features such as clause connections to create complex and compound sentences tend to develop later. Students know the grammar and can probably create such sentences in a grammar test; however, applying this knowledge in an open-ended narrative context seems to be more difficult.

Some interesting observations were made regarding some features of good Japanese stories, in that patterns similar to those of native speakers could emerge in the learners’ narratives independent of their classroom experience. The above-mentioned use of correct verb forms is one such example. The tendency to use the non-past tense for certain verb forms is not taught in class, and a possible reason could be either the avoidance of more difficult and longer forms or it could be the unfamiliarity of a certain form (*deshita*, copula in past tense). These hypotheses still need to be tested.

Another challenge for the learners of Japanese is the mastery of grammatical particles, which are strongly related to the cohesion of the text. Particles are language-specific features of Japanese, and although learners are taught the basic particles at the beginner level, correct application of such particles to narrative creation does not appear to have been achieved.

This study has identified sentence style and cohesion devices, as represented by the use of particles, as the most difficult components of Japanese to master, even at the intermediate level. Thus, it is a continuing challenge for learners of Japanese to improve these aspects in order to be able to produce narratives at a native-like level of proficiency.

References

- Aksu-Koç, Ayhan, 1994. Development of linguistic forms: Turkish. In: Berman, R., et al. (Eds.), *Relating Events in Narrative: A Crosslinguistic Developmental Study*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, pp. 329-385.
- Bamberg, Michael, 1987. *The Acquisition of narratives: Learning to use language*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Bavin, Edith and Timothy Shopen, 1985. The development of narrative by Warlpiri children. *Berkeley Linguistics Society* 11:1-13.
- Berman, Ruth, 2001. Setting the narrative scene: how children begin to tell a story. In: Nelson, K., et al. (Eds.), *Children's Language Volume 10: Developing Narrative and Discourse Competence*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, pp. 1-30.
- Berman, Ruth, 2004. The role of context in developing narrative abilities. In: Strömquist, S., et al. (Eds.), *Relating Events in Narrative: Volume 2: Typological and Contextual Perspectives*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, pp. 216-280.
- Berman, Ruth and Dan Slobin, 1994. Narrative structure. In: Berman, R., et al. (Eds.), *Relating Events in Narrative: A Crosslinguistic Developmental Study*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, pp. 39-84.
- Clancy, Patricia and Pamela Downing, 1987. The use of wa as a cohesion marker in Japanese oral narratives. In: Hinds, J., et al (Eds.), *Perspectives on Topicalization: The Case of Japanese Wa*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam; Philadelphia, pp. 3-56.
- Hickmann, Maya and Henriëtte Hendriks, 1999. Cohesion and anaphora in children's narratives: a comparison of English, French, German, and Mandarin Chinese. *Journal of Child Language* 26:419-452.
- Hinds, John, 1984. Topic maintenance in Japanese narratives and Japanese conversational interaction. *Discourse Processes* 7:465-482.
- Karmiloff-Smith, Annette, 1992. *Beyond modularity*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Nakamura, Kei, 1993. Referential structure in Japanese children's narratives: The acquisition of wa and ga. In: Choi, S. (Ed.), *Japanese/Korean Linguistics*. Centre for the Study of Language and Information, Leland Stanford Junior University, Stanford, pp. 84-99.

- Makino, Seiichi, 2011. Honyaku de nani ga ushinawareru ka – Sono Nihongo kyooikuteki imi (What will be lost in translation? Imprecations to the Japanese language education). *Journal CAJLE* 12:23-59.
- Mayer, Mercer, 1969. *Frog, where are you?* New York: Dial Press.
- Minami, Masahiko, 2008. Telling good stories in different languages: Bilingual children's styles of story construction and their linguistic and educational implications. *Narrative Inquiry* 18(1): 83-110.
- Severing, Ria and Ludo Verhoeven, 2001. Bilingual narrative development in Papiamentu and Dutch. In: Verhoeven, L., et al. (Eds.), *Narrative Development in a Multilingual Context*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam; Philadelphia, pp. 255-275.
- Watanabe, Noriko, 1990. Wa and ga: from the perspective of the deictic center in discourse. In: Hoji, H. (Ed.), *Japanese/Korean Linguistics*. The Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford, pp. 129-140.
- Wigglesworth, Gillian, 1990. Children's narrative acquisition: a study of some aspects of reference and anaphora. *First Language* 10:105-125.

About the Author

Hiromi Muranaka is a lecturer at the University of Western Sydney. Her research interests include oral and written narratives by children and second language speakers, and bilingual child language acquisition.