

The Acquisition of English Relative Clauses by Japanese Learners of English

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Abstract

This paper examines the linguistic factors that may lead to difficulty for Japanese learners of English in learning relative clauses. Specifically, it reviews several studies from two approaches, contrastive analysis and typological universals. Studies that use contrastive analysis pointed to differences in the structure of English and Japanese, such as the absence of relative pronouns in Japanese as the source of difficulty. Studies that use typological universals often focus on the Accessibility Hierarchy to explain Japanese learners' difficulty in learning English relative clauses. Finally, I discuss several techniques to teach English relative clauses to Japanese learners.

Introduction

Let's combine two sentences to make a new sentence. Most Japanese learners of English read the above statement when they learn about English relative clauses (RCs). Even though they can combine two sentences into one sentence using relative pronouns in form-focused language lessons, it is still difficult for them to actually comprehend and produce English RCs in real situations. This paper aims to examine the factors that make Japanese learners of English have difficulty using English RCs. First, it points out differences in the construction of English and Japanese RCs; then, it focuses on the inherent difficulty of the target language (TL) (i.e. English) with respect to RCs. In the final section, techniques of teaching English RCs are proposed.

Differences between English and Japanese Relative Clauses

One of the reasons why Japanese learners of English are confused in comprehending and producing English RCs is differences in the structures of English and Japanese. One of these differences is the position of RCs in a sentence. In

general, English RCs are head-initial or post-nominal, that is, the RC follows the head noun phrase (NP), while Japanese RCs are head-final or pre-nominal, that is, the RCs precedes the head NP (Sadighi, 1994). In Examples (1) and (2), the underlined parts of the example sentences indicate the matrix (i.e., main) clause.

(1) English: *John saw the child [who gave Mary an apple].*

(2) Japanese: *John-ga [[Mary-ni
John-Nom Mary-Dat
ringo-o ageta] kodomo]-o mita.
apple-Acc gave child-Acc saw
(Nakayama, 2002, p. 406)*

In Example (1), the RC *who gave Mary an apple* is located to the right of the head NP *the child*, while in Example (2) the RC *Mary ni ringo o ageta* is located to the left of the head NP *kodomo*.

Another difference between English RCs and Japanese RCs is the presence or absence of relative pronouns. English RCs have relative pronouns such as *who*, *which*, *what*, and *that* (Sadighi, 1994; Norris, 2000); however, Japanese does not have relative pronouns (Nakayama, 2002).

(3) English: [*The girl [who speaks Basque]] is my cousin*

(Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 574)

(4) Japanese: [[*Basukugo-o hanasu*]

Basque-Acc speak
shoujyo]-wa watasbi-no itoko desu.
 girl-Nom I-Gen cousin is

In Example (3), the head noun *the girl* preceded the RC *who speaks Basque* with the relative pronoun *who*. On the other hand, in Japanese Example (4), there is not a particular relative pronoun between the head noun *shoujyo* and the RC *Basukugo o hanasu*.

Furthermore, an English relative pronoun and the verb in the RC show number agreement (Matsumoto, 2007) since a finite verb agrees in number with the subject in general. In the case of RCs, when the relative pronoun is the subject of the RC, it takes on the number of the head noun, and the verb in the RC consequently agrees with the head noun as well. (The relative pronoun itself does not actually change in form.) Verbs in Japanese RCs, on the other hand, do not agree in number with the relative pronoun (Nakayama, 2002), as there is no subject-verb agreement in Japanese. The following examples show the contrast (English examples are from Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999, p. 574):

(5) English: [*The boy [who speaks Basque]] is my cousin.*

(6) English: [*The girls [who speak Basque]] are my cousin.*

(7) Japanese: [[*Basukugo-wo hanasu*]

Basque-Acc speak
syounen]-wa watasbi-no itoko desu.
 boy-Nom I-Gen cousin is

(8) Japanese: [[*Basukugo-wo hanasu*]

Basuku-Acc speak
syoujyo-tati]-wa watasbi-no itoko desu.
 girls-Nom I-Gen cousin is.

In Examples (5) and (6), the verbs in the RCs are inflected depending on whether the head nouns is singular or plural. In contrast, in Examples (7) and (8), the verb in the RCs *hanasu* does not have to agree in number with the subjects of the RCs.

Additionally, English relative pronouns vary depending on case and whether it refers to an animate or inanimate noun (Norris, 2000). Japanese RCs, on the other hand, do not have relative pronouns to begin with, as mentioned above (Matsumoto, 2007; Norris, 2000; Sadgihi, 1994) (see Examples (9) and (10)).

(9) English: *I know the place that/which you mentioned.*

(10) English: *I work for the man that/who/whom you met.*

(Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 579)

In Example (9), the head noun *the place* is inanimate and therefore, either relative pronoun *that* or *which* would be accepted. In Example (10), since the head noun *the man* is animate, the relative pronoun options are *that*, *who*, or *whom*, but not *which*.

These differences between English and Japanese RC structures and the existence of relative pronouns may pose challenges to the Japanese learner of English.

Matsumoto (2007) mentioned other distinguishing features between English RCs and Japanese RCs that are beyond

the lexical level. He pointed out that there are meaning variations in Japanese RCs depending on situational contexts (see Example (11)).

- (11) *[[bon-o katta] gakusei] wa*
 book-Acc bought student Top
doko desu ka?
 where is Op
 ‘Where is the student who bought
 a book?’

(Matsumoto, 2007, p. 372).

The above Japanese RCs sentence was usually interpreted as “Where is [the student who bought a book]?” (Matsumoto).

However, in particular contexts, the above Japanese sentence can be translated in two ways (Matsumoto):

Interpretation A:

- [[bon-o katta] gakusei]*
 Book-Acc bought student
kara tukue mo katta.
 from desk also bought
 “(I) also bought a desk from the
 student (from whom) (I) bought
 a book.”

Interpretation A describes a situation where a speaker of the sentence *bon o katta gakusei wa doko desu ka* bought a book as well as desk from a student. Then, the speaker was looking for the student. In this context, the utterance in Example (11) is interpreted as meaning “Where is [the student (from whom) (I) bought a book]?” (Matsumoto).

Interpretation B:

- [[bon-o katta] gakusei]*
 Book-Acc bought student
ni pen mo katte-ageta.
 to/for pen also buy-gave

“(I) also bought a pen for the student (for whom) (I) bought a book.”

Interpretation B, on the other hand, specifies a situation where the speaker of the sentence *bon o katta gakusei wa doko desu ka* bought a pen for the student, and also bought a book for that student. After that, the speaker was looking for the student, and asked for help to find that student. In this context, the utterance in Example (11) is interpreted as meaning “Where is [the student (for whom) (I) bought a book]?” (Matsumoto).

The above examples of Japanese RCs indicate that Japanese RCs can be interpreted differently depending on contexts. Matsumoto’s (2007) study only pointed out the difficulty for English learners who studied Japanese as a second language. However, I would like to suggest that these differences between the two languages also mean that English RCs can also be a challenge for Japanese learners of English.

According to Stockwell, Bowen, and Martin (1965), there is a “hierarchy of difficulty” of learning the target language (TL) (as cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008). They mentioned that the most difficult case is when the NL has one form which corresponds to two forms in the TL. The second and third cases are when the TL has a particular feature that the NL does not have, or the NL has a certain feature that is absent in the TL. The fourth case is when the NL has two forms which converge as one form in the TL. The fifth case, which is the easiest for acquisition, is when both the TL and NL have a feature used in a similar way. Based on this hypothesis, one might expect that mastering Japanese RCs by English learners might be difficult, as the learners

need to distinguish among the various meanings in different contexts for the same RC structure. In other words, regarding the interpretation of a RC, English speakers only have one interpretation from one structure, while Japanese RC could have three interpretations from one structure. This is the fourth case in the hierarchy of difficulty mentioned above. On the other hand, in terms of learning the structures of Japanese RCs, since English RCs have more structural variations compared with

Japanese RCs, it might be easier for English learners of Japanese to master Japanese RC structures. On the other side of the coin, Japanese speakers of English might experience more difficulty in learning English RC structures because the TL has more structural variety than their L1. This can be categorized as the most difficult case in Stockwell and other's (1965) hierarchy of difficulty.

Table 1 summarizes the differences in features and placement of English and Japanese relative clauses.

Table 1

Contrastive Features of English and Japanese Relative Clauses

Features of RCs	English	Japanese
Location	Head-initial (post-nominal)	Head-final (pre-nominal)
Requirement of relative pronouns	Yes	No
Animateness of relative pronouns	Expressed by choice of pronouns (<i>who, whom, whose, that</i>)	Not expressed
Inanimateness of relative pronouns	Expressed by choice of pronouns (<i>which, whose, that</i>)	Not expressed
Case of relative pronouns	Subject: <i>who/ which/ that</i> Object: <i>who(m)/ which/ that</i> Possessive: <i>whose</i>	None
Number agreement between head noun and verb in the RC	When the relative pronoun is the subject of the RCs	None

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis claims that differences and similarities of the NL and the TL would affect ease and difficulty in learning the TL (Lado, 1957 as cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008), and that we can predict L1 interference with the TL. In other words, Japanese learners

of English might be challenged to master English RCs because there are different structural features between English and Japanese RCs. However, a contrastive analysis like this only forms assumptions and predictions and needs empirical studies of actual usage of the TL by the

learners to be confirmed (Block, 2003; Gass & Selinker, 2008). Further, a contrastive analysis needs to be informed by more recent developments in the field of Second Language Acquisition, such as understanding of language universals and information processing. These will be reviewed next.

Difficulty with English Relative Clauses due to the Target Language's Structure

Although the differences between English RCs and Japanese RCs can be one source of difficulty for Japanese learners of English who are trying to master English RCs, they may also be challenged by this structure's inherent complexity. This inherent complexity of the target structure affects learners of various languages, but since my focus is on Japanese students, I will report on studies that focused on Japanese students. There have been three major explanations for learners' problems with RCs in English that are based on the inherent complexity of this structure.

The most important work on the complexity of RCs was the proposal by Keenan and Comrie in 1977 based on language typology (Izumi, 2003), which studies similarities and differences among all languages in the world (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Keenan and Comrie (1977) proposed the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy Hypothesis (NPAHH) for relative clauses based on their research on more than fifty languages (Izumi, 2003). The NPAHH indicates the universal order of accessibility of the different grammatical relations in the RC for relativization; that is, there is a scale of "applicability" for some categories or types of NPs depending on the language (Matthews, 1997, p. 4). The following list (Table 2, following Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, pp. 572-3) shows the different degrees of accessibility using example sentences in English, with the top sentence having the highest accessibility (i.e., more common in languages), and the bottom sentence having the lowest accessibility (i.e., observed less frequently in languages).

Table 2

The Accessibility Hierarchy with Examples in English

Accessibility Hierarchy	Examples
Subject NP	<i>The book [that is on the coffee table] was written by Wallace.</i>
Direct object NP	<i>The authors [that he mentioned] are well known.</i>
Indirect object NP	<i>The girl [(to) whom we gave the message] is not here.</i> <i>The girl [who gave the message to] is not here.</i>
Oblique object NP	<i>The child [from whom you took the candy] is crying.</i> <i>The child [whom you took the candy from] is crying.</i>
Genitive NP	<i>The man [whose name you wanted to know] is Cal North.</i>
Object NP of comparison	? <i>The only person [that I was shorter than] was Fritz.</i> * <i>The only person [than whom I was shorter] was Fritz.</i>

The Subject NP type is the least marked structure, and is described as “typical” in any language (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 22), and the Object NP of Comparison type is the most marked structure (Izumi, 2003).¹ An implication of this hierarchy is that if a certain language has an X type of RCs, it

will also have the other, less marked types of RCs (Izumi, 2003; Matthews, 1997, p. 249). In addition, the hypothesis indicates the universal order of difficulty of learning RCs; that is, it was predicted that learning RCs with the subject NP is easier than learning RCs with the object NP of comparison (Norris, 2000).

Table 3

A Comparison of English and Japanese RCs based on the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy

Subject NP	ENG	<u>That book</u> <i>that</i> is on the coffee table <u>was written by Wallace</u> .
	JPE	Coohee teebul-no ue-ni aru <u>hon-wa Wallace-niyotte kakareta</u> . Coffee table-Gen on is book-Top Wallace-by written.
Direct NP	ENG	<u>The authors</u> <i>that</i> he mentioned <u>are well known</u> .
	JPE	Kare-ga hanashita <u>sakka-wa yoku shirareteimasu</u> . He-Nom mentioned author-Top well known.
Indirect Object NP	ENG	<u>The girl</u> (<i>to</i>) <i>whom</i> we gave the message <u>is not here</u> . <u>The girl</u> <i>who</i> we gave the message <i>to</i> <u>is not here</u> .
	JPE	Watashi-tachi-ga messseeji-wo watashita <u>syoujyo-wa koko-niwa imasen</u> . I-plural-Nom message-Acc gave girl-Top here is not.
Oblique Object NP	ENG	<u>The child</u> from <i>whom</i> you took the candy <u>is crying</u> . <u>The child</u> <i>whom</i> you took the candy from <u>is crying</u> .
	JPE	Anataga ame-wo totta <u>kodomo-ga naiteimasu</u> . You-Nom candy-Acc took child-Nom crying is.
Genitive NP	ENG	<u>The man</u> whose name you wanted know <u>is Cal North</u> .
	JPE	Anata-ga namae-wo shiritakatta <u>otoko-wa Cal North desu</u> . You-Nom name-Acc know wanted man-Top Cal North is.
Object NP of comparison	ENG	?The only person that I was shorter than was Fritz. *The only person than whom I was shorter was Fritz.
	JPE	Watashi-yori senohikui <u>yuitsu-no hito-wa Fritz deshita</u> . I-than shot only-genitive person-Top Fritz was.

Note. The English examples are from Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999, pp. 572-3).

Table 3 shows a comparison of English and Japanese RCs (matrix clauses are underlined and RC pronouns are in italics). As seen in the table, even though both languages have various types of RCs based on the classification of the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy, English RCs have strong structural relationships with the head nouns and the classification of RC types is based on this relationship. Unlike English RCs, Japanese RCs do not have strong structural relationships with the head noun. Users of Japanese thus need to infer the implicit relationship between the head nouns and their RCs, largely based on the context and co-text (Comrie, 2002 as cited in Ozeki & Shirai, 2007). Following Stockwell and other's (1965) hierarchy of difficulty (as cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008), it may be challenging for Japanese learners to

comprehend and produce English RCs, which require them to analyze the grammatical roles between head nouns and the RCs, something they do not have to do in their native language.

The other major hypothesis about RCs is Kuno's (1974) Perceptual Difficulty Hypothesis (PDH) (Izumi, 2003). The PDH suggests that center-embedding of a RC would be more difficult to comprehend than placement at the beginning or end of the sentence. In other words, with regard to English RCs, center-embedded RCs are expected to interfere with processing the matrix clause (main clause), while right embedded RCs do not (Izumi, 2003; Kubota, 1993; Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Examples of four types of English RCs are the following (the underlined parts mark the matrix clause [Kubota, 1993]).

Type 1: Center-embedded sentence: SS (Subject of sentence is Subject of relative clause)

The people who live in Philadelphia are busy.

Type 2: Center-embedded sentence: SO (Subject of sentence is Object of relative clause)

The people who we know live in Philadelphia.

Type 3: Right-embedded sentence: OS (Object of sentence is Subject of relative clause)

I know some people who live in Philadelphia.

Type 4: Right-embedded sentence: OO (Object of sentence is Object of relative clause)

I know the people who you know.

Based on the PDH, OS and OO types are easier to process than SS and SO types. Table 4 below shows a comparison between English and Japanese RCs. As seen in Table 4, the SS and SO types in Japanese cannot be rendered using a center-embedded structure (1a and 2a in Table 4), that is, both Japanese versions of these types of the English RCs need to be rendered as left-embedded clauses to be

grammatical (1b and 2b in Table 4). Further, when English sentences with the OS and OO types are translated into Japanese, the main clauses and the RCs have to be in separated sentences if right-embeddedness is applied (3a and 4a in Table 4). In addition, for the OS and OO types of Japanese RCs, both left-embedded and center-embedded versions are acceptable (3b, 3c, 4b, 4c in Table 4).

Table 4

A Comparison between English and Japanese RCs based on the Perceptual Difficulty Hypothesis

SS	ENG	1. <i>The people who live in Philadelphia are busy.</i>
	JPE	1a. ? <i>Hito-wa Philadelphia-ni sundeiru-to isogashii-desu.</i> people-Top Philadelphia-in live-if busy-is. (If people live in Philadelphia, they become busy) 1b. <i>Philadelphia-ni sundeiru hito-wa isogashii-desu.</i> Philadelphia-in live person-Top busy-is
SO	ENG	2. <i>The people who(m) we know live in Philadelphia.</i>
	JPE	2a. * <i>Hito-ga watashi-tachi-ga shitteiru Philadelphia-ni sundeimasu.</i> Person-Nom I-pl-Nom know Philadelphia-in live 2b. <i>Watashi-tachi-ga shitteiru hito-wa Philadelphia-ni sundeimasu.</i> I-pl-Nom know person-Top Philadelphia-in live
OS	ENG	3. <i>I know some people who live in Philadelphia.</i>
	JPE	3a. ? <i>Watashi-wa nanninka hito-wo shitteimasu. Philadelphia-ni sundeimasu.</i> I-Top some people-Acc show. Philadelphia-in live.] (I know some people. They live in Philadelphia.) 3b. <i>Watashi-wa Philadelphia-ni sundeiru nanninka-no hito-wo shitteimasu.</i> I-Top Philadelphia-in live some-genitive people-Acc know 3c. <i>Philadelphia-ni sundeiru nanninka-no hito-wo watashi-wa shitteimasu.</i> Philadelphia-in live some-genitive people-Acc I-Top know
OO	ENG	4. <i>I know the people who(m) you know.</i>
	JPE	4a. ? <i>Watashi-wa sono-hito-wo shitteimasu. Anata-ga shitteiru.</i> I-Top the people-Acc know. You-Nom know 4b. <i>Watashi-wa anata-ga shitteiru-hito-wo shitteimasu.</i> I-Top you-Nom know-people-Acc know 4c. <i>Anata-ga shitteiru hito-wo watashi-wa shitteimasu.</i> You-Nom know people-Acc I-Nom know

Note. The English examples are from Doughty, 1991 (as cited in Kubota, 1993, p. 30).

In order to find out whether the NPAHH and the PDH would affect the use of English RCs by Japanese learners of English, a few studies (Saito, 1984; Takazawa, 1987; Kawauchi, 1988) were conducted (as cited in Kubota, 1993). These studies show that the easiest form for Japanese EFL learners to acquire is the OS types, while the most difficult type is the SO type. Kubota (1993) also conducted an experiment to verify (a) whether the NPAHH and the PDH can explain difficulties encountered by Japanese learners of English and (b) whether the OS type is the easiest and the SO type is the hardest for these learners. In Kubota's study, 199 Japanese senior high school students were asked to complete three different tasks, a translation and sentence-combining task, a grammatical judgment task, and a free composition task. Overall, from the study, Kubota found that the OS type is indeed the easiest, which supports previous studies by Saito (1984), Takazawa (1987), and Kawauchi (1988). Furthermore, regarding the PDH, in only the sentence-combining task and the free composition task, the Japanese learners of EFL produced the OS type more frequently than the OO, SS, and SO types. In short, the results of this study provided evidence to support the PDH.

In addition, Kubota (1993) stated that the results in the grammatical judgment task followed the NPAHH except with respect to the genitive type of RCs. In brief, Japanese learners of English exhibited the following order in producing English RCs, from the easiest to the hardest: subject > genitive > object > object of preposition.

The reason why these Japanese students used the genitive type of English RCs accurately, he assumed, was that the form of the relative pronoun *whose* is salient and the learners identified *whose* + noun as a chunk (Kubota, 1993, p. 48). Kubota concluded that although some of his results supported the previous findings including the PDH and the NPAHH, his study also produced different results depending on the task types. He pointed out the possibility that different tasks required the students to use different language competences such as receptive or productive abilities. However, he suggested that further research was needed to investigate Japanese learners' use of English RCs.

In a third study based on the idea of the NPAH, Hashimoto (2007) examined comprehension of English RCs produced by Japanese learners. In his study, a reading task was conducted based on Gibson's (1998) idea of syntactic prediction locality theory. In this theory, it is assumed that processing difficulty occurred when learners exceed their capacity to deal with understanding the new information due to missing background knowledge of language features such as form, meaning, and discourse (Hashimoto, 2007). The reason why the processing mechanism was paid attention to was because the "psychological ease of comprehension" was associated with the NPHA (Keenan & Comrie, 1977 as cited in Hashimoto, 2007, p. 3). This indication led to the prediction that object-extracted RCs, which represented the direct object type of RCs, are more difficult for L2 learners to comprehend than subject-extracted RCs (Hashimoto, 2007). Examples of

subject-extracted and object-extracted RCs are in Examples (12) and (13) (Hashimoto, 2007, p. 7):

(12) Subject-extracted relative clause

*[The nurse [who kisses the doctor]]
treats the patient.*

(13) Object-extracted relative clause

*[The nurse [whom the doctor kisses]]
treats the patient.*

Using the above sentences, Hashimoto measured the time it took fifteen Japanese university students to read the above sentences. The data showed that the average reading time of the main verbs was longer than any other parts of speech in both sentences. Hashimoto reasoned that the students possibly tried to recall the subject noun phrase of the main clause when they reached the main verbs located in the end of the RCs. In addition, in sentence (13) (object-extracted RC), it took longer for the students to read the RC than the other parts of the sentence. The explanation was that in this object-extracted RC, the verb *kisses* in the RC and the verb *treats* in the matrix clause are juxtaposed, which might have made comprehending the sentence exceed the students' working memory and as a result, it took them longer to read it. Hashimoto acknowledged that his results were based on limited data and further research was needed to confirm that L2 learners indeed take a longer time to read object-extracted RCs.

Even though two of the three studies reported here suggest that further research on examining the use of English RCs by Japanese learners of English is necessary, we can tentatively conclude that particular types of English RCs such as the SS type, the SO type, and objective-extracted RCs seem difficult for Japanese learners of

English. For teachers, it is important to understand what factors could trigger challenges in learning English RCs by the students and to prepare some ideas about how to teach English RCs with respect to both fluency and accuracy.

Suggestions for Teaching English Relative Clauses to Japanese Learners of English

Most Japanese students first learn about English RCs by combining two sentences into one, as mentioned at the beginning of this paper; however, there are advantages and disadvantages of this linear method. For example, Nakamori (2002) mentioned that it is effective to analyze the complex construction of English RCs. However, this strategy might not reflect the real use of RCs, whose function is modifying nouns. Thus, Nakamori proposed using an alternative strategy named the hierarchical teaching strategy to provide learners with the introduction of noun phrases with RCs before they learned full sentences. An advantage of this strategy was that learners could have the opportunity to use the noun phrases in communicative contexts by learning where they should put them. In addition, he conducted experimental research on the two methods of teaching English RCs, linear and hierarchical, and investigated which strategy is more effective for helping L2 learners improve using English RCs. His study revealed the effectiveness of using the hierarchical teaching strategy over the linear teaching strategy.

Another technique for teaching English RCs is based on the idea of the Accessibility Hierarchy. Gass (1982), Eckman, Bell, and Nelson (1988), and Hamilton (1994) examined whether or not L2 learners of English are able to generate

RCs forms after different instruction modes. she found that teaching the more difficult types of RCs forms first would help learners identify RC types which were located lower on Accessibility Hierarchy (as cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008). Gass's study (1982) revealed that the group of subjects who received instruction in only object of preposition RCs (which are more difficult in the Accessibility Hierarchy) were able to respond to subject and direct objective RCs (easier RC types on the Accessibility Hierarchy). Thus, English teachers could consider providing instructions in more difficult types of English RCs before teaching easier types. Although this technique may be effective in teaching English RCs to Japanese students, it cannot be assumed that it would be effective in all teaching circumstances. According to Ammar and Lightbown (2003), instructing less marked RCs before marked RCs also helped Arabic learners of English to generate other RC types (as cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008). Thus, for now, teachers will have to consider all options when designing their instructional plans.

More specifically for Japanese university students, Norris (2001) proposed using noticing and consciousness-raising activities with communicative input, including the TL uses, in order to reduce students' tendency to avoid using RCs. His suggestions involve mainly controlled or semi-controlled activities. His first activity was the instruction of extended descriptions of RCs patterns. Specifically, Norris emphasized the importance of teaching the distinction between relative adverbs and relative pronouns to Japanese university students. The other activities included Following-up Noticing and Consciousness-Raising Exercises, which

provided the students with various types of English RCs and had them identify what types of RCs were used in either written or spoken input. In this activity, Norris emphasized the importance of teaching formulaic phrases, which helped students to learn how to interact with teachers, because the students could use the formulaic phrases when they wanted to clarify or confirm what the teacher said. Thus, teaching formulaic phrases would also give students a chance to improve their communication skills while completing the activity. Norris even recommended dictating to the students Japanese and English RCs, and then, to increase their chances of noticing features of English RCs, having students translate them from Japanese to English. Furthermore, he mentioned the importance of productive and follow-up activities that gave students a chance to enhance their long-term ability to use English RCs.

In my view, it is also important for English teachers to observe and understand their own students' challenges in learning English RCs, as well as analyzing what teaching styles are conducive for student learning.

Summary and Conclusion

Based on the above review of studies on English and Japanese RCs, there are two particular reasons why Japanese learners of English have difficulty in acquiring English RCs. One is there are differences in structure between English and Japanese RCs, specifically, the absence of relative pronouns and the variations of pragmatic use in Japanese RCs that affect the learners' ability to master English RCs. The other reason was the influence of the PDH and the NPAHH, which were proposed based on the idea of the

complexity of English RCs and language universals. However, not all findings based on the PDH and the NPAHH were consistent; thus, further research is necessary to understand reasons why many Japanese learners of English struggle with English RCs.

In this paper, I have also reviewed several suggestions for teaching RCs to Japanese learners of English. The first teaching technique is using the hierarchical teaching strategy, which gives students a chance to practice combining noun phrases using RCs instead of combining two full sentences. Another technique is based on the idea of the Accessibility Hierarchy. It suggests that teaching marked RC types before less

marked RC types may encourage students to generate less marked RC types without explicit instructions. However, there are exceptions and thus teachers should be careful when considering this technique. The final suggestion is using noticing and consciousness raising activities, which enhance students' awareness of the English RC structure. In addition to following these suggestions, I believe that it is important for individual teachers to analyze their own students' habits and to examine reasons why their students have difficulty learning English RCs, in order to identify effective teaching strategies to help them use English RCs more accurately.

Notes

¹ A marked form is "any linguistic form which is less usual or less neutral than some other form" (Trask, 1999, p. 180).

Abbreviations in Gloss Translation

Nom: Nominative case

Acc: Accusative case

Dat: Dative case

Top: Topicalizer

Op: Operator

Gen: Genitive case

Pl: Plural

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