

Japanese Oral Narrative Style by Native and Non-Native Speakers

MAENO Yoshimi
Harvard University

Abstract:

The major purpose of this study is to explore: (a) What is the Japanese adult L1 oral narrative style? (b) Have native English-speaking bilinguals acquired the form characteristic of Japanese narrative style? In order to investigate these questions, I used total of hundred eighty narratives of childhood memories, stories of an injury, and memorable incidents during a trip which were told by fifteen native Japanese-speaking bilinguals (NJB) and fifteen native English-speaking bilinguals (NEB). These prompts have been used successfully for interviewing adults (McCabe and Peterson, 1991), and children (Peterson and McCabe, 1983).

All tapes were first transcribed into utterances, and then broken into narrative clauses. Each narrative clause was scored as one of the following categories of High Point Analysis: attention, orientation, action, evaluation, outcome, and coda. Differences in narrative structure in Japanese and in English are explored using Stanza Analysis and High Point Analysis. These two analyses are compatible: Stanza Analysis defines units, while High Point Analysis categorizes the content of units.

In the Japanese narratives by both NJB and NEB the most frequent form was a stanza pattern consisting of three-lines. "Outcome" was used more in Japanese in all three kinds of stories by both NJB and NEB. "Action" was used more in English injury story by both groups. In short NEB seem to have acquired the characteristic of Japanese narrative to some extent.

Acquiring the narrative structure of L2 is important in terms of one's comprehensibility in L2 in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In order to maximize opportunities for the development of proficiency in narrative, more research on narrative style is necessary so that teachers of Japanese will be able to teach Japanese narrative style explicitly in the classroom.

1. Introduction

Foreign language learners have trouble producing oral narratives which sound "natural" to native speakers. Though foreign language (FL) students are explicitly taught vocabulary, grammar, and phonology, discourse style is typically not part of the FL curriculum. Language teachers focus on students grammatical errors (Lado, 1983). Advanced FL learners' difficulties in conveying their message to native speakers may, however, relate less to their vocabulary, grammatical, or phonological errors than to their way of structuring oral discourse. Producing culturally appropriate extended discourse units is perhaps the most challenging aspect of FL acquisition.

In this study I investigate: (a) what precisely adult Japanese narrative styles by native Japanese-speaking bilinguals (NJB) are, and (b) whether native English-speaking bilinguals (NEB) have similar characteristic of

Japanese narrative style, by analyzing narratives of their earliest memory, injury story and travel story in English and in Japanese.

2. Definition of Minimal Narrative

Definition of minimal narrative is "a sequence of two restricted (independent) clauses which are temporally ordered; that is, a change in their order will result in a change in the temporal sequence of the original semantic interpretation" (Labov and Waletzky, 1967, p.28).

3. The Importance of Narratives

Narration is a common form of oral discourse, and narrative style reflects the interaction between language and culture (Blum-Kulka & Snow, 1992; Hymes, 1982; Gee, 1986, 1989, 1991; Minami & McCabe, 1992; Scollon & Scollon, 1981). According to Labov (1972), narratives have served as tools for understanding cognitive and linguistic processes. Narratives are a particularly useful tool in relating personal experience. Personal narratives are a means of making sense of our experiences, and form the basis of the discourse analyses of Labov (1972) and of Peterson and McCabe (1983). Asking for an earliest memory, stories of an injury, and a memorable incident during a trip are prompts that have been used successfully for interviewing adults (McCabe and Peterson, 1991), and children (Peterson and McCabe, 1983).

In this study narratives on these three topics in each language (forty-five stories in Japanese and forty-five in English) were collected from fifteen Japanese native speakers and fifteen English native speakers (total of hundred eighty stories), and used for analyses throughout this study.

Minami and McCabe (1991, 1992) described how Japanese children's narrative structure differs from English speaking children's narrative structure, using a synthesis of Stanza Analysis and High Point Analysis. Since these methods of analysis are appropriate and reliable in reflecting the structure of Japanese narratives, they were used in a previous study of mine (Maeno, 1996), and were used again for the analysis of the current study.

4. Research Questions

The major purpose of this study is to explore whether native English-speaking bilinguals (NEB) have acquired the form characteristic of Japanese narrative. The questions I intend to address in this proposed project are the following:

- (a) What are the adult Japanese oral narrative styles?
- (b) Have native English-speaking bilinguals (NEB) acquired the form characteristic of Japanese narrative style?

In order to investigate the above questions, I used narratives of subjects' earliest memories, stories of an injury, and memorable incidents during a trip.

5. Methods

5.1 Subjects

Participants are two groups of bilinguals; fifteen native speakers of English who are bilingual in Japanese (NEB)¹ and fifteen native speakers of Japanese (NJB)² who are bilingual in English. Both groups have studied the other language to a level of advanced proficiency in grammar so that they can construct stories in both languages.

5.2 Procedure

Each subject had two interview sessions, one in English and the other in Japanese. Each session included three topics: prompts to elicit their earliest memories, injury stories, and memorable incidents during their trip. A native speaker of Japanese conducted the interviews in Japanese, and a native speaker of English in English. To minimize the possible effects of order, half the subjects in each group were interviewed in Japanese first, and the other half were interviewed in English first.

Each interviewer narrated his or her own stories as prompts consistently for all the subjects. Each subject was asked to tell their stories spontaneously right after the interviewer's prompt. During the narrative productions the interviewers let the subjects take the lead and respond minimally to the subjects' narratives.

The stories used for analysis in this study are produced by each subject without the interviewer's interruption. The interviewers try to avoid asking questions except for clarification because of the possibility of changing the direction of the story. For this study only stories about specific events were analyzed³ (McCabe and Peterson, 1991).

¹ English native bilinguals are graduate and undergraduate students who are advanced Japanese students (fourth-year or fifth-year level) in a university in the U.S. I chose them as the subjects of this study because they are native speakers of English, and are fluent enough to tell extended stories in Japanese.

² Japanese native bilinguals are graduate students in the U.S. or those who finished undergraduate in Japan. They have been in the U.S. less than five years so that they do not have too much influence in English. I chose them as subjects for this study because they are native speakers of Japanese, and are fluent enough to tell extended stories in English.

³ Some people have a tendency to reminisce about a series of events.

5.3 Coding

All tapes were first transcribed into utterances, and then broken into narrative clauses. Each narrative clause was scored as one of the following: orientation, action, evaluation, outcome, and coda. Differences in narrative structure in Japanese and in English are explored using Stanza Analysis and High Point Analysis. These two analyses are compatible: Stanza Analysis defines units, while High Point Analysis categorizes the content of units.

6. Stanza Analysis and High Point Analysis

6.1 Stanza Analysis

Stanza Analysis was developed by Hymes (1982) and extended by Gee (1989, 1991). If speech errors and disfluencies are removed, an "ideal" structure that reflects the overall shape and patterning of a text remains (Gee, 1989). This ideal structure contains "lines." A "stanza" is a group of lines about a single topic that captures a single "vignette." In other words, a "stanza" is a "thematically constant unit" composed of "change of fragment character, event, location, time, or narrative function"(Gee, 1989). Stanzas sometimes fall into related pairs, which are called "strophes." In turn, strophes comprise larger units called "parts" which make up the story as a whole.

6.2 High Point Analysis

After using Stanza Analysis to divide narratives into "lines," "stanzas," and "parts," High Point Analysis based on the Labovian approach (Labov, 1972; McCabe & Peterson, 1991; Minami & McCabe, 1992; Peterson & McCabe 1983) was used to analyze the narrative function of each "line." Each line plays the role of "attention getter," "orientation," "action," "evaluation," "outcome," or "coda" (see Coding for High Point Analysis, and example of coded transcript). High Point Analysis enabled me to examine whether elements like "orientation," "evaluation," "action," and "outcome" were used similarly in Japanese and English narratives. By using both Stanza Analysis and High Point Analysis, I can delineate patterns of discourse within the two languages and then compare them across languages.

6.3 Reliability

All transcripts were coded by the author who is bilingual in Japanese and English. Twenty percent of the data from the previous study (Maeno, 1996)

"Descriptive sequences constituted 19.0% of the childhood and 16.7% of the adolescent recollections. Conversely, 81.0% and 82.3% of all memories were specific" (p.149, McCabe and Peterson, 1991).

were independently coded by native speakers of each language as well as the author. Reliability for Stanza Analysis was estimated using the formula: (number of agreements on segmentation / number of agreements on segmentation + number of disagreements) x 100 percent. Rate of agreement for "lines" was estimated to be 87.95 percent for Japanese, and 83.67 percent for English. Rate of agreement for "stanza" was estimated to be 85 percent for Japanese, and 80 percent for English. Reliability of High Point Analysis was estimated using Cohen's kappa (Bakeman and Gottman, 1986).⁴ Reliability of High Point Analysis for Japanese was .90 and .83 for English. Estimates of kappa over .81 represent extremely high agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977).

Coding for High Point Analysis

- Att** "attention getter" - attention getter at outset of narrative
(e.g., "yeah, the earliest thing I remember")
- OR** "orientation" - setting the stage for the narrated events
(e.g., "it was a friend's birthday")
- OR(A)** - Orientation with Action
- OR(E)** - Orientation with Evaluation
- A** "action" - action (e.g., "puresento o mot-te ik-i-mas-i-ta":
" (I) brought a present.")
- A(E)** - Action with evaluation
- E** "evaluation" -evaluative (e.g., "kanasi-kat-ta": "(I) was sad",
"tanosi-kat-ta": " (It) was fun")
- one's viewpoint
(e.g., "there were very distinct dichotomies in the classroom.")
- OUT** "outcome" - representing the result(s) of specific actions,
whether evaluatively (e.g., "blood gushed out") or
in terms of physical consequences
(e.g., "[a nail] came off") or both (e.g."fracture [of arm
occurred]").
- C** "coda" - e.g., "hai, kodomo no hanasi desu": "Here you go,
(It) is (my) childhood story",

4

P_o - P_c

κ =

1 - P_c

P_o is the proportion of agreement actually observed, whereas P_c is the proportion expected by chance. P_o is computed by adding the tallies representing agreement and dividing by the total number of tallies. P_c is computed by adding by chance agreement probabilities for each coding category.

"ato de wakarimasita kedo ...": "(I) understood later, but ...",
 " ima yoku oboete imasen": " Now (I) don't remember very well." (at the end of the story)

Example of Coded Transcript

Stanza 1

*ITK: 1 my injury story Att
 story was.
 *ITK: 2 when I was a ten years old OR
 3 when I played soccer football. OR
 *INV: uh huh.
 *ITK: 4 I I sled to on the stone. A
 ITK: 5 and I I had cut my head []. OUT
 %err: \$EXP

Stanza 2

*ITK: 1 and the
 uhhh I didn't [/] I didn't know what happened. E
 *ITK: 2 but uhhh some teammate asked me what happened
 on your head. A
 *ITK: 3 and I had a lot of blood
 of [//] on my face. OUT

Stanza 3

ITK: 1 and uh some uh students called a [] ambulance. A
 %err: \$PAR
 ITK: 2 and uh I I was took [] to the hospital. A
 %err: \$VER

Stanza 4

*ITK: 1 and uh the doctor said to me. A(E)
 *ITK: oh I needed to stay at the hospital at least for two weeks.
 *ITK: 2 but uhhh E
 I didn't feel so much big problem [=! laugh] so [*].
 %err: \$EXP
 ITK: 3 I enjoyed the even the [] staying in that uh A(E)
 uhhh at the hospital like a
 just like a hotel [=! laugh].
 %err: \$EXP
 *ITK: 4 so [=! laugh] I I walking around [//] walked around uh
 hospital to have to look into A
 look for something interesting.
 *INV: uh huh.

Stanza 5

*ITK: 1	[=! laugh] so doctor said to me you need to go away [=! laugh].	A
*INV:	[=! laugh].	
ITK: 2	just in a one [] week [=! laugh].	E

7. Analyses

(a) What are the Japanese adult L1 oral narrative styles?

Each type of narrative element was proportionalized over all narrative clauses because narratives vary in length. First, I examined what proportion of the stanzas produced in Japanese and in English by the native speakers are one-line, two-line, three-line and so forth. Histograms (Figure 1 and Figure 2) show the proportion of one-line, two-line, and three-line stanzas in each narrative prompt to see if there is any prominent pattern in each language. Three-line stanzas typical of Japanese children's narrative (Minami, 1991; 1992) were found prominent in the Japanese narrative and in my previous study.

Secondly, I computed group means for the proportion of all narrative clauses in the two languages of each native language group that are coded as "attention getter," "orientation," "action," "evaluation," "outcome," and "coda." Tables (Table 1 and Table 2) show the mean of each narrative element in each narrative prompt to see if there is any prominent pattern in each language.

A distribution pattern of using more outcomes in Japanese and more actions in English was found in the previous study (Maeno, 1996). To examine if "outcome" appears in the last position of a stanza, I investigated the frequency of "outcome" appearing at the end of each stanza.

(b) Have native English-speaking bilinguals (NEB) acquired the form characteristic of Japanese narrative style?

To answer this question, I compare the differences between the results from native Japanese-speaking bilinguals (NJB) and the ones by native English-speaking bilinguals (NEB). If the Japanese narratives by NEB have similar characteristics as the narratives by NJB, it is likely that NEB have acquired the form characteristic of Japanese narrative at least to some extent.

8. Results

8.1 High Point Analysis

The Injury Stories (INJ) by both NJB and NEB in Table 1 and Table 2 show that there is a tendency of more outcomes in Japanese than in English. The childhood stories (CHD) also show that pattern, and the travel stories

(TRP) indicate that pattern in a smaller extent. I would interpret this as the Native English bilinguals (NEB) seem to have acquired the characteristic of Japanese oral narrative style to some extent.

The proportion of “outcome” appearing in the last position of a stanza shows the greater extent in Japanese than in English in any of the prompts by both groups of native speakers. However, the numbers are so small that I will need the t-test to answer the significance level.

In my previous study I found more “actions” in English than in Japanese. This pattern appeared most in the injury stories by both NJB and NEB. In addition, both groups had the tendency of using more “OR(A)” (orientation with action) in Japanese than in English in all the prompts.

**Table 1: Means of each coding for each prompt in each language
By Native Japanese-speaking bilinguals (NJB) (%)**

	Att	OR	OR(A)	OR(E)	A	A(E)	E	OUT (last)	C
JAP	4.04	33.8	11.69	7.29	13.73	4.55	11.92	<u>7.14</u> (2.46)	4.61
ENG	7.71	31.73	6.51	4.63	13.62	4.68	19.06	4.78 (1.99)	4.43
JAP	3.08	22.23	12.53	5.41	17.13	5.06	14.80	<u>14.76</u> (6.53)	4.47
ENG	2.72	24.31	6.53	4.73	21.15	7.04	19.29	10.30 (5.37)	3.07
JAP	1.75	29.28	9.99	13.74	15.77	5.60	16.73	4.33 (3.12)	1.70
ENG	1.09	34.22	8.45	10.77	14.38	3.06	21.24	4.17 (1.22)	2.23

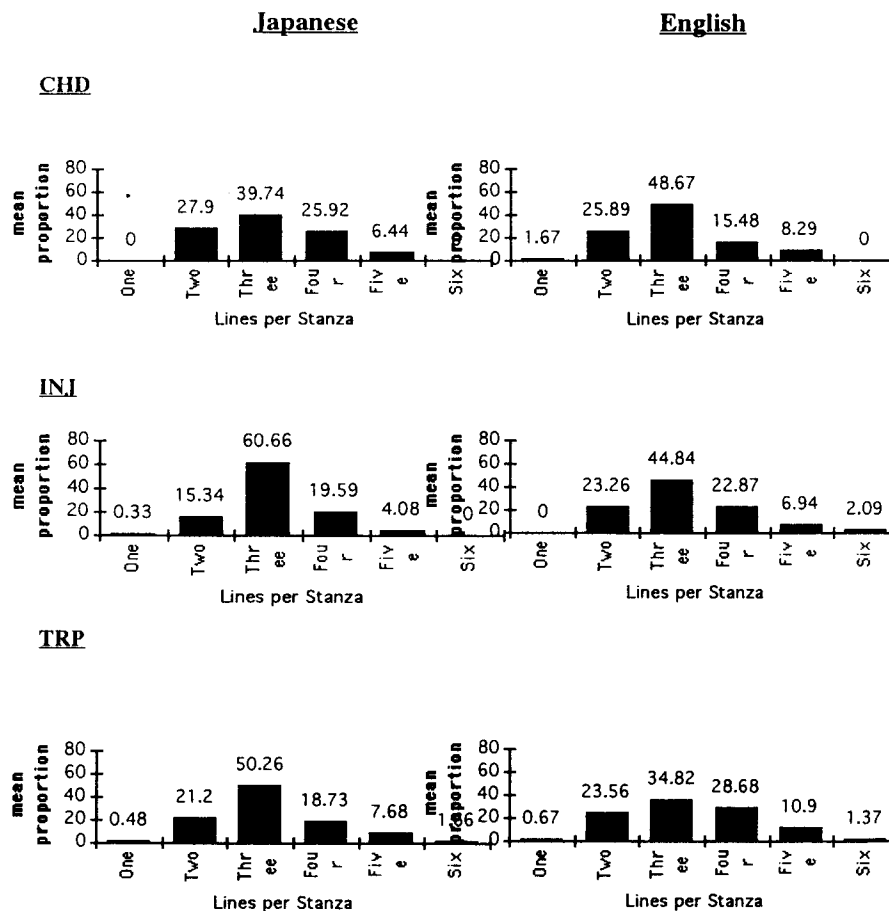
**Table 2: Means of each coding for each prompt in each language
By Native English-speaking bilinguals (NEB) (%)**

	Att	OR	OR(A)	OR(E)	A	A(E)	E	OUT (last)	C
JAP	3.42	29.67	11.97	4.66	17.54	7.89	16.34	<u>6.45</u> (5.02)	5.54
ENG	7.65	26.69	8.69	9.16	15.13	6.75	16.18	4.92 (2.37)	5.06
JAP	4.24	19.72	11.46	7.55	13.52	4.23	18.56	<u>15.08</u> (7.37)	4.79
ENG	4.65	19.19	8.36	7.03	21.12	3.79	21.50	10.29 (4.48)	3.16
JAP	1.88	21.32	11.56	13.33	18.29	6.42	22.02	2.99 (1.26)	1.79
ENG	3.14	28.06	9.52	9.57	16.64	7.23	21.22	2.39 (1.18)	2.03

8.2 Stanza Analysis

The three-line stanzas typical of Japanese children's narrative were found prominent in this study's injury stories (INJ) and in travel stories (TRP), and especially in injury stories (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The NJB have the greater extent of differences between their Japanese stories and their English stories in all three prompts.

**Figure 1: Histogram of lines per stanza
By Native Japanese-speaking bilinguals (NJB)
(mean %)**

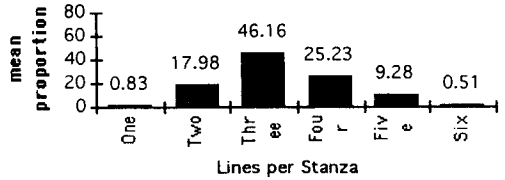
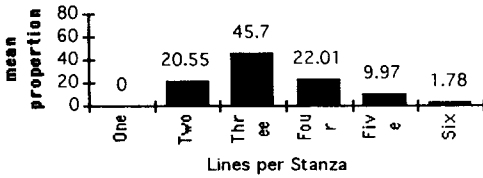


**Figure 2: Histogram of lines per stanza
By Native English-speaking Bilinguals (NEB)
(mean %)**

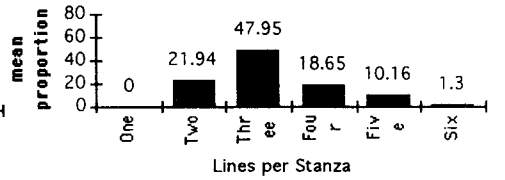
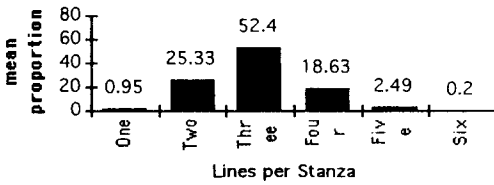
Japanese

English

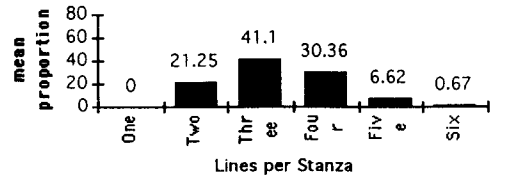
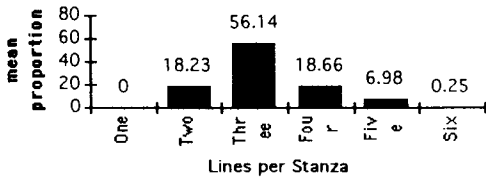
CHD



INI



TRP



9. Discussion

(a) What are the adult Japanese oral narrative styles?

The Japanese oral narrative styles by adult native speakers tend to organize their oral stories in three-line groups with very few of the other number of lines in their injury stories and travel stories. Childhood stories (CHD) somehow didn't show this pattern, and actually showed this pattern in their English sessions. The injury and travel stories in English on the other hand tend to spread more in terms of number of lines. In other words, when adult Japanese native speakers told their injury and travel stories, they organized their stories in more variety of lines such as two-line and four-line stanzas.

When adult Japanese native speakers told their stories in Japanese, they used more "outcome" in all three prompts, especially greater extent in their injury stories. They tend to use "outcome" in the last position of a stanza more often than they did in their English stories. They used more "action" in English in their injury stories than their Japanese injury stories. They used more OR(A) in Japanese in all of the three prompts than in English stories.

(b) Have native English-speaking bilinguals (NEB) acquired the form characteristic of Japanese narrative style?

Native English-speaking bilinguals in this study seem to have the similar pattern as the native Japanese-speaking bilinguals. The native English speaking bilinguals also tend to organize their oral stories in three-line groups with very few of the other number of lines in their injury stories and travel stories. As shown in the native Japanese speakers, childhood stories (CHD) show the reverse of this pattern; more prominent three-line stanzas in English. As shown in the Japanese native speakers data, the injury and travel stories in English by NEB also tend to spread more in terms of number of lines; they organized their stories in more variety of lines such as two-line and four-line stanzas.

As adult Japanese native speakers told their stories in Japanese using more "outcome" in all three prompts, especially greater extent in their injury stories, the NEB also have the similar pattern showing in Table 2. They also tend to use "outcome" in the last position of a stanza more often than they did in their English stories. In addition they used more "action" in English in their injury stories than their Japanese injury stories like NJB did. They also have the similar tendency as NJB using more OR(A) in Japanese in all of the three prompts than in English stories. Therefore, I would like to conclude that native English speakers have acquired the form characteristic of Japanese oral narrative styles of adult Japanese native speakers.

10. Conclusion and Educational Implication

In this study I examined whether NEB have acquired culturally appropriate oral narrative skills in Japanese. Acquiring the target language's narrative style is the most important and challenging part of second language (L2) learning, and there is typically no specific explanation of narrative style given in L2 language textbooks.

To improve grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary in second language classrooms, Contrastive Analysis (Lado, 1983), a common method in L2 teaching, is designed to anticipate transfer errors from the native language to a L2. Transfer errors in these domains are frequent, but students' difficulties in conveying their message to native speakers of Japanese may relate less to their vocabulary, grammatical, and phonological errors than to their way of structuring oral discourse. Producing culturally appropriate extended discourse units is perhaps the most challenging aspect of L2 acquisition.

In addition to grammar, vocabulary, sociolinguistic appropriateness, kinesics, and cultural understanding, L2 learners need to learn how to tell narratives in a culturally appropriate manner in order to be able to function fully as a community member. Japanese teachers do not teach the Japanese narrative style explicitly. Japanese students have been learning Japanese narrative style incidentally mainly through listening and reading Japanese narratives particularly when living in Japan.

Acquiring the narrative structure of L2 is also important in terms of: (1) one's comprehensibility in L2 in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, (2) ability to read and understand L2 literature, and (3) ability to write effectively in L2, since the rhetorical organization of written genres shows structural differences in different languages (Fox, 1986; Kaplan, 1966; 1972).

How can language teachers help their students become linguistically proficient in the classroom setting? In order to maximize opportunities for the development of proficiency in narrative style among students, teachers need to become aware of the narrative style first. Therefore, more research on narrative style is necessary so that teachers of Japanese will be able to teach Japanese narrative style explicitly in the classroom. There is still a lot more work in terms of how I can put the result of this study into practice.

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