Interspeaker Variation in Particle Stranding Ellipsis in the Two-Grammar Model for Japanese

Yosuke Sato and Hiromune Oda

1. Introduction

Particle Stranding Ellipsis (PSE) has received much attention in the Japanese literature (Hattori 1949, 1960; Hayashi 2001; Yoshida 2004; Sato and Ginsburg 2006, 2007; Sato 2008, 2012; Goto 2012; Nasu 2012a, b; Shibata 2014; Sato and Maeda 2019; Sakamoto and Saito 2018; Yamashita 2019; Fujiwara 2022, among many others). What has been heretofore overlooked, however, is that PSE exhibits considerable interspeaker variation. In this paper, we report the results of our preliminary acceptability judgement survey to show that there is a population split among native Japanese speakers regarding the grammatical accessibility of PSE. We propose that there are two partially different grammars currently in competition in synchronic Japanese regarding the fine syntactic representation of the topic marker *–wa*: the bound morpheme adjoining to the host and the free morpheme heading the functional TopicP projection, for both analytical possibilities are permissible within the finite hypothesis search space sharply constrained by Universal Grammar (UG) and consistent with incoming primary linguistic data (PLD). Our findings support the Multiple-Grammars Model of language acquisition (Han et al. 2007, 2016) whereby a learner of a particular language may end up acquiring a partially different grammar from his/her neighbor in the allegedly homogenous linguistic community when the PLD input is indeterminate as to the ultimate choice of grammar and hence is subject to multiple syntactic analyses consistent with general constraints on acquisition paths imposed by UG.

2. Interspeaker Variation on PSE among Japanese Speakers

PSE is illustrated in (1B). Note that this utterance starts with the topic marker *–wa(a)* when uttered as a response to the polar question in (1A).

(1) A: Kosian-wa moo urikire-masi-ta-ka?
smooth.sweet.bean.paste-TOP already sold.out-POL-PST-Q
'Has smooth sweet bean paste already been sold out?'
B: Waa, urikire-masi-ta-ne. Tubuan-wa ari-masu-yo.
TOP sold.out-POL-PST-PRT mashed.sweet.bean.paste-TOP be-POL-PRT
'intended: Smooth sweet bean paste has been sold out, but mashed sweet beat paste is available.'
(adopted from Arita 2015: her ex. (9))

We start with the hitherto unnoticed observation that PSE exhibits considerable interspeaker variation. We conducted an acceptability judgement survey using Google Form with 120 native Japanese speakers

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 Proceedings of the 42nd West Coast Conference on Formal Linguistics, ed. Shweta Akolkar et al., 338-345. Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Proceedings Project.

from varying places of birth/living, mostly in their 10s and 20s, and asked them to rate seven PSE examples, some of them culled from the literature on a 5-point scale (1 = completely disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = can't tell, 4 = agree, 5 = completely agree), as indicated as appropriate in what follows. Note that Examples 1 (= (1)), 2, 3 and 7 are utterance-initial PSE sentences whereas Examples 4, 5 and 6 are non-utterance-initial PSE sentences, as exemplified in (2), which corresponds to our Example 5.

(2) A: Ken-wa kuru-no?
Ken-TOP come-Q
'Will Ken come?'
B: Tasikadewanaikedo, waa kim-as-en-yo.
I.am.not.certain.but TOP come-POL-NEG-PRT
'I am not certain, but he won't come.'
(adopted from Sato and Maeda 2019: 371, their (32))

The results of this acceptability judgement survey are summarized in Figures 1–7. The morphological glosses and English translations for all the PSE examples below are provided in Appendix.

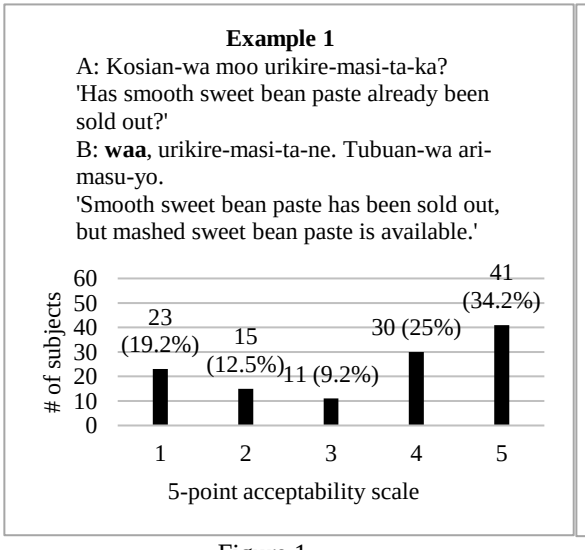
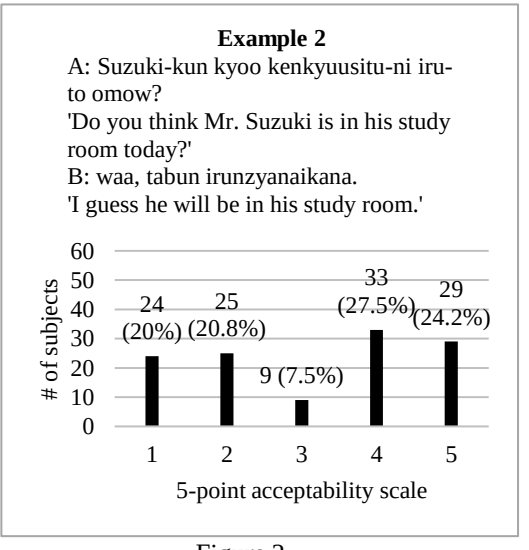


Figure 1



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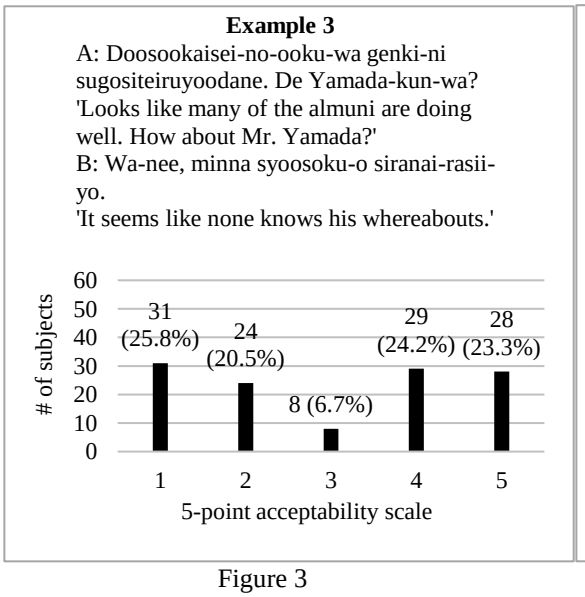


Figure 3

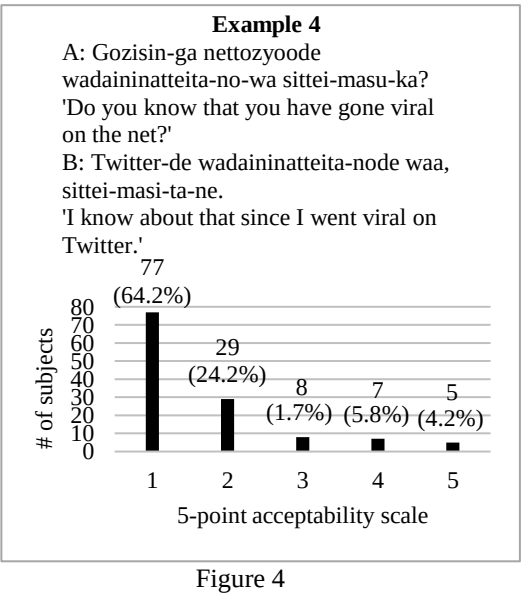


Figure 4

Example 5

A: Ken-wa kuru-no?
'Will Ken come?'
B: Tasikadewanaikedo, waa, kim-as-en-yo.
'I am not certain, but he won't come.'

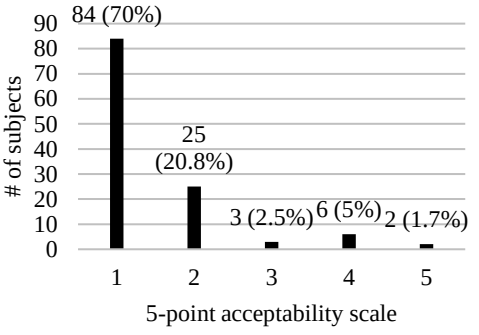


Figure 5

Example 6

A: Ken-wa kyoo kuru-no?
'Will Ken come today?'
B: Eeto, waa, tabun kore-mase-n-yo. Saikin baito-de isogasii-mitai-desu-kara.
'Hmm, maybe, he cannot come because it looks like he has been busy with his part-time job recently.

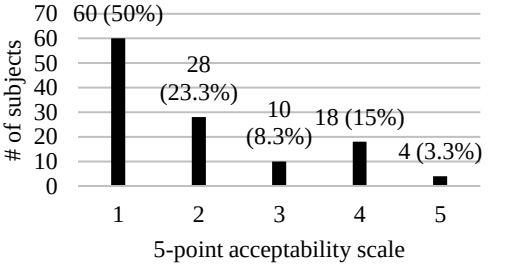


Figure 6

Example 7

A: Ken-wa kyoo kuru-no?
'Will Ken come today?'
B: Waa, eetoo, tabun kore-mase-n-yo. Saikin baito-de isogasii-mitai-desu-kara.
'Hmm, maybe, he cannot come because it looks like he has been busy with his part-time job recently

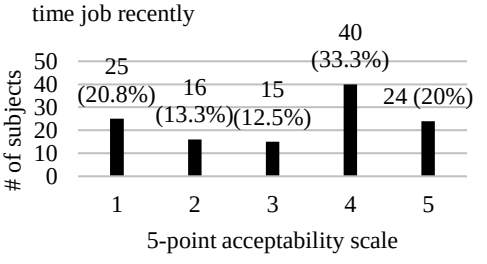


Figure 7

Three observations can be made on the basis of the results. Firstly, Figures 4–6 indicate that most of our subjects rejected non-utterance-initial PSE cases, confirming the well-known observation that PSE is an utterance-edge phenomenon (Shibata 2014; Sato and Maeda 2019). Secondly, the other Figures exhibit a twin-peak distribution at the group-level regarding the acceptability of the utterance-initial PSE cases, clustering either on the lower range (1 or 2 ratings) or on the higher range (4 or 5 ratings). The most important finding for our present purposes, however, is that there is a population split among native Japanese speakers with respect to the grammatical accessibility of PSE. We checked how consistent and stable the acceptability judgements expressed by the subjects were also at the individual participant level. Figure 8 tabulates the acceptability cluster of the within-subjects ratings of Examples 1, 2, 3 and 7. This Figure shows that a) out of 120 speakers, 66 either accepted (gave 4 or 5 rating) or rejected (gave 1 or 2 rating) the four examples four out of four times, and that b) 102 either accepted or rejected them almost consistently, i.e., three out of four times or across the board. These observations thus suggest that the Japanese population is indeed divided into two groups regarding PSE.

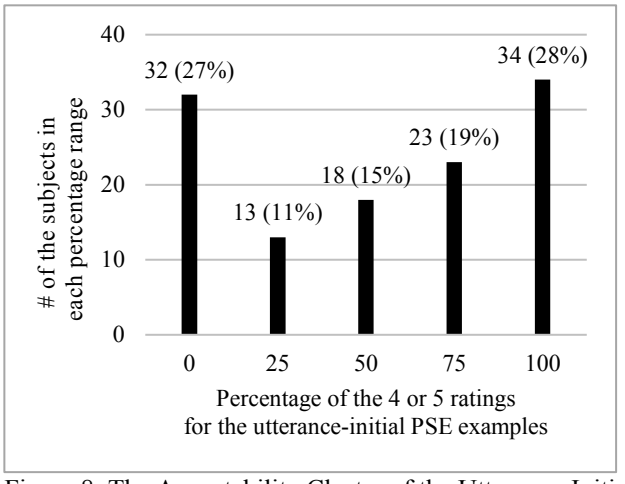
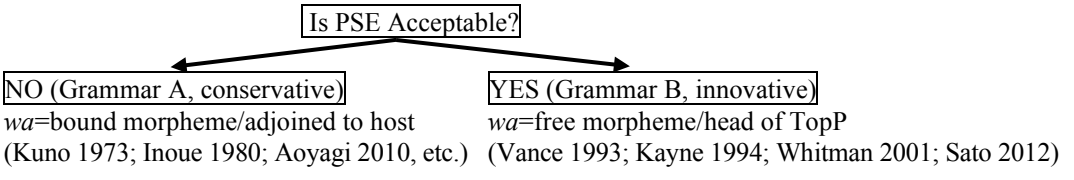


Figure 8: The Acceptability Cluster of the Utterance-Initial PSE Examples at the Individual Level

3. PSE in the Two-Grammar Model for Japanese

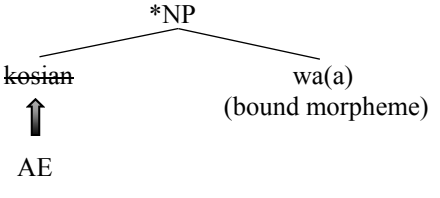
Following the Multiple-Grammars Model of language acquisition (Han et al. 2007, 2016; Roeper 1999; Yang 2000; Sato 2023) and diachronic change (Kroch 2001), suppose that the existence of the two groups of Japanese speakers with respect to the grammatical accessibility of PSE reflects ongoing competition in Japanese between two partially different grammars – call them Grammar A and Grammar B – regarding the fine syntactic representation of the topic marker *–wa*, as schematically depicted in (3), both of which are available within the narrowly restricted hypothesis search space provided by UG.

(3)

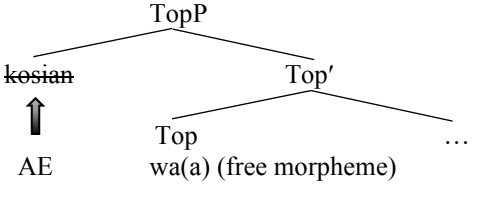


We propose that PSE is blocked in Grammar A because the hypothetical application of AE results in a stranded affix filter violation (Lasnik 1981) due to the bound nature of the topic maker, as illustrated in (4). By contrast, PSE is made available in Grammar B through Argument Ellipsis (AE) targeting the topic phrase in [Spec, TopP], as shown in (5): see Sato and Maeda (2019), Sakamoto and Saito (2018) and Fujiwara (2022) for arguments in favor of the AE analysis of PSE.[1]

(4) Grammar A + AE → No PSE



(5) Grammar B + AE → PSE



Indeed, the PLD data concerning possible case arrays, free-standing use of the topic marker *–wa* and the documented presence of word-level stress on the marker collectively serve as possible triggering cues

[1] There is another possibility that the topic marker *-wa* takes the nominal phrase to be elided as its complement and projects its own projection (TopP or CaseP), which is located in, e.g., Spec, CP (cf. Takahashi 2011). The choice between this grammar (Grammar C) and Grammar B does not affect the discussion in the text as far as the availability of PSE is concerned. The Multiple-Grammars Model of language acquisition argued for here actually allows the possibility that Grammar C can be chosen as one of the (three or even more) viable options compliant with restrictions imposed by UG.

for some Japanese learners/speakers to opt for Grammar B (innovative) while keeping Grammar A (conservative). (6) shows the incompatibility of the nominative case particle with the topic marker, and (7) illustrates the case where the topic marker is used as a free-standing morpheme.

(6) Megumi-(*ga)-wa itumo onakagasuitei-masu-ne.
Megumi-NOM-TOP always hungry-POL-PRT
'Megumi is always hungry, isn't she?'

(7) Koda Taro, zisyoo kaisyayakuin, **wa** sakuya settonoyoogide taihos-are-masi-ta.
Koda Taro self-proclaiming executive TOP last.night charge.of.larceny arrest-PASS-POL-PST
'Taro Koda, a self-proclaimed executive, was arrested on a charge of larceny last night.'

Firstly, as noted by Kayne (1994), *–wa* is in complementary distribution with *–ga*, as shown in (6), a pattern that follows from and hence supports the adoption of Grammar B: *–wa* selects the NP *Megumi* as its specifier and hence leaves no room for *–ga* to intervene between the topic marker and the NP. Secondly, TV broadcast, newspapers and journals include naturally occurring utterances like the one in (7), where the topic maker is used as if it were an independent prosodic word (see also Vance 1993). Finally, considering the documented evidence supporting the central role of prosody as a learning cue for grammar acquisition (see Cutler 1997, for instance), the word-level stress on *–wa* in possible PLD examples like (7) signals to Japanese learners/speakers that the particle may function as an independent function word (in addition to a bound morpheme). It is telling in this connection that putting a word-level accent on particles is not permitted in Korean (Jun 1993; Shibata 2014; Sato and Maeda 2019; Bošković 2023). This prosodic difference explains the difference between Japanese and Korean with respect to the availability of PSE (though the reader is referred to An 2019 for examples of "particle stranding interruption" in Korean, which exhibit similar properties as Japanese PSE).

Note that our current proposal even allows the possibility that multiple competing grammars co-exist in a speaker as long as the PLD is compatible with all of them. We suggest that this is actually the case with the 18 speakers in Figure 8 in the middle range, who accepted two, but rejected the other two of the utterance-initial PSE examples. Our interpretation of the existence of this type of speakers is that they have yet excluded either Grammar A or Grammar B because both grammars are consistent with their PLD input, thereby exhibiting varying, "inconsistent" judgements. This, in turn, indicates that a learner does not necessarily arrive at a fixed, "final" stage of language acquisition, as typically assumed in the standard generative tradition, but instead can flexibly adopt one or more states of grammar. One interesting application of the line of reasoning suggested here is that our proposed approach to synchronic change will shed new light on the thorny issue of satiation (Snyder 2021), the increasing acceptability of a native speaker consultant to a syntactic pattern that they initially found it to be unacceptable due to multiple exposures to the relevant pattern.

We believe that the Multiple-Grammars Model is most compatible with the emergentist view of parameters in recent minimalism advocated by Biberauer (2019), Biberauer and Roberts (2017) and Roberts (2019). Under this view, language variations, or so-called parameters, are not prespecified in UG as in the GB-theory but are underspecified and "emerge" in the course of language acquisition due to interactions of Factor 2 (PLD) and Factor 3 (general cognitive principles). In the case under discussion, the choice between Grammar A and Grammar B (and possibly Grammar C; see footnote 1) is not prespecified in UG, and nominal phrases start from bare NP (cf. Oda 2022). The Language Acquisition Device then decides, based on the PLD, whether the topic marker adjoins to an NP without projecting or projects its own projection, resulting in acquisition of Grammar A and B, respectively. Those 18 speakers in our survey who appear to be "in between" have acquired both grammars from scratch based on their PLD, just like those speakers who have acquired either of them. Note also that the emergentist view of parameters can also accommodate the satiation effect; I-language can keep changing, or updated, upon input, since there is no prespecified grammatical options encoded in UG and a new grammar compatible with the additional input can emerge because of cumulative language learning.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we have reported the results of our preliminary acceptability judgement survey to argue that there is a population split among native Japanese speakers regarding the grammatical

accessibility of PSE. This point is supported by the bimodal distribution of the number of speakers who either accepted or rejected PSE. The split in question, we have further argued, reflects ongoing competition between two, or possibly more than two, partially different grammars available to Japanese learner/speakers, a natural consequence if the grammars are both consistent with the incoming PLD and the narrowly restricted hypothesis space curved out by innate predispositions/UG. We have further noted that some Japanese speakers may even fluctuate between the two grammars, thereby accounting for their varied, often unstable judgments concerning some PSE examples. The findings reported here remind us of the renewed importance of the individual nature of I-language. I-language, after all, is not anything like a fixed state in our mind/brain but a gestalt effect with core grammatical prototypes shared among the speakers of the allegedly homogenous language community.

Appendix

Example 1

A: こしあんは　もう　売り切れましたか？
kosian-wa　moo　urikire-masi-ta-ka?
smooth.sweet.bean.paste-TOP　already　sold.out-POL-PST-Q
'Has smooth sweet bean paste already been sold out?'

B: は(waa)、　売り切れましたね。つぶあんは　ありますよ。
waa,　urikire-masi-ta-ne.　Tubuan-wa　ari-masu-yo.
TOP　sold.out-POL-PST-PRT　mashed.sweet.bean.paste-TOP　be-POL-PRT
'intended: Smooth sweet bean paste has been sold out, but mashed sweet beat paste is available.'

(adopted from Arita 2015: her ex. (9))

Example 2

A: 鈴木君、　今日　研究室に　いると　思う？
Suzuki-kun　kyoo　kenkyuusitu-ni　iru-to　omow
Suzuki-TIT　today　study.room-LOC　be-COMP　think
'Do you think Mr. Suzuki is in his study room today?'

B: は(waa)、　たぶん　いるんじゃないかな。
waa　tabun　irunzyanaikana
TOP　probably　be-I.guess
'I guess he will be in his study room.'

Example 3

A: 同窓会生の多くは　元気に　過ごしているようだね。で、山田君は？
doosookaisei-no-ooku-wa　genkini　sugositeiruyoodane　De　Yamada-kun-wa
alumni-GEN-many-TOP　well　doing　and　Yamada-TIT-TOP
'Looks like many of the alumni are doing well. How about Mr. Yamada?'

B: は(wa)ね、　みんな　消息を　知らないらしいよ。
wa-nee　minna　syoosoku-o　siranai-rasii-yo
TOP-PRT　everyone　news-ACC　know-seems-PRT
'It seems like none knows his whereabouts.'

Example 4

A: ご自身が　ネット上で　話題になっていたのは　知っていますか？
gozisin-ga　nettozyoode　wadaininatteita-no-wa　sittei-masu-ka?
self-NOM　on.the.net　went.viral-GEN-TOP　know-POL-PRT
'Do you know that you have gone viral on the net?'

B: ツイッターで　話題になっていたので、は(waa)、　知っていましたね。
Twitter-de　wadaininatteita-node　waa　sittei-masi-ta-ne
Twitter-on　went.viral-because　TOP　know-POL-PST-PRT
'I know about that since I went viral on Twitter.'

(Yamashita 2019:86, his (26))

Example 5

A: 健は　　来るの？
Ken-wa　　kuru-no?
Ken-TOP　　come-Q
'Will Ken come?'

B: 確かではないけど、は(waa)、　来ませんよ。
Tasikadewanaikedo,　waa　　kim-as-en-yo.
I.am.not.certain.but　TOP　　come-POL-NEG-PRT
'I am not certain, but he won't come.'

(adopted from Sato and Maeda 2019: 371, their (32))

Example 6

A: 健は　　今日　　来るの？
Ken-wa　　kyoo　　kuru-no
Ken-TOP　　today　　come-Q
'Will Ken come today?'

B: えーと、は(waa)、多分　　来れませんよ。　　最近　　バイトで
eetoo　waa　　tabun　　kore-mase-n-yo　　saikin　　baito-de
hmm　TOP　　maybe　　can.come-POL-NEG-PRT　　recently　　part.time-for
忙しいみたいですから。
isogasii-mitai-desu-kara
busy-look-POL-because
'Hmm, maybe, he cannot come because it looks like he has been busy with his part-time job recently.'

(adopted from Shibata 2014, cf. Sato and Maeda 2019:371, fn.6)

Example 7

A: 健は　　今日　　来るの？
Ken-wa　　kyoo　　kuru-no
Ken-TOP　　today　　come-Q
'Will Ken come today?'

B: は(waa)、えーと、多分　　来れませんよ。　　最近　　バイトで
waa　eetoo　tabun　　kore-mase-n-yo　　saikin　　baito-de
TOP　hmm　maybe　　can.come-POL-NEG-PRT　　recently　　part.time-for
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isogasii-mitai-desu-kara
busy-look-POL-because
'Hmm, maybe, he cannot come because it looks like he has been busy with his part-time job recently.'

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