1. Purpose

To investigate English and Japanese speakers’ online processing of referential expressions (REs: e.g., pronoun, repeated name) in discourse so as to compare RE processing across languages and by natives vs. learners (in progress: Chinese natives & Chinese/Japanese learners of English)

2. Introduction

Salience/Accessibility of discourse entities

- The salience of discourse entities is modulated by multiple factors (e.g., syntactic role)
- Salience is inversely related to RE explicitness

Online processing of REs: English speakers

- Gordon, Gross & Gilliom’s (1993) Exp. 4: sentence-by-sentence self-paced reading task
  - a. George jumped out from behind a tree and frightened Debbie.  
  - b. He was surprised at her hysterical reaction.
  - c. She/Debbie screamed loudly and ran away.

Online processing of REs: Mandarin Chinese speakers

- Yang, Gordon, Hendrick & Wu’s (1999) Exps. 2a&4: 3-sentence passages similar to Gordon et al.’s
- 3 RE forms: null pronoun (“Null”), overt pronoun (“Overt”), repeated name (“Name”)
- RT results in the [Continue] condition: Null = Overt < Name → RNP

RE forms in Japanese (null-argument language)

- Null pronouns predominantly used for discourse topics in elicited narratives (e.g., Clancy 1980)
- Use of kare/kanozyo ("he"/"she") is controversial
  - Not frequently used in production (e.g., Clancy 1980)
  - Hoji (1990): they share a deixic property with the demonstrative are (“that”)
  - Noguchi (1997): they can still be “pronouns”; they share, with English pronouns, “a feature that sets a certain set of lexical categories apart from the others” (p. 783)

Research Questions

1. Will English speakers replicate Gordon et al.’s RNP?
2. Do Japanese speakers process REs as Chinese speakers do? (Will Null and Overt pronouns pattern together in Japanese RE processing?)

3. Methodology (sentence-by-sentence self-paced reading task)

Participants: 40 English speakers & 36 Japanese speakers

Materials

- English: 20 test items (5- vs. -Latin-squared) • 2 RE forms: Overt vs. Name  
  - 2 discourse types: [Continue] vs. [Shift]
  - 34 filler items
  - 4 item lists + 4 lists in reversed-item order

Japanese

- 30 test items (k-5, Latin-squared): 20 closely translated from English + 10 for Null conditions
  - 3 RE forms: Null vs. Overt vs. Name
  - 2 discourse types: [Continue] vs. [Shift]
  - 51 filler items
  - 6 item lists + 6 lists in reversed-item order

4. RT results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English speakers</th>
<th>Japanese speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1" alt="Graph of English speakers' RT results" /></td>
<td><img src="image2" alt="Graph of Japanese speakers' RT results" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Discussion

- Both groups showed the RNP in the [Continue] condition
  - Overt < Name in English; Null < Name in Japanese
  - Japanese speakers prefer Name in the [Shift] condition
  - Null dispreferrence is probably due to lack of gender features
  - Status of Overt kare/kanozyo in Japanese
    - Overt-dispreferred both for highly salient and for less salient entities
    - Overt falls outside the RE hierarchy (see Introduction above)
  - Overt in Japanese processed differently from Overt in Chinese due to:
    - infrequent use of Overt pronouns in Japanese?
    - sensitivity to factors other than syntactic role (form-specific multiple-constraints approach, Kaiser & Trueswell 2008)?

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Selected references


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