

Acquisition of past tense in English by Japanese speakers: is it a syntactic problem?

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1. Introduction

There has been a debate in SLA research about whether the failure of L2 learners to consistently produce surface inflectional morphological forms should be attributed to unsuccessful acquisition in the domain of functional categories or their features, or to the failure to realise morphological forms independently of their acquired knowledge of syntax. The former position proposes that variable use of the inflection results from a lack of functional categories or particular features of functional categories (Beck 1998, Eubank 1994, Hawkins and Chan 1997, Franceschina 2001), and the latter position assumes a surface mapping problem from syntactic appropriate representations onto morphological forms (Lardiere 1998a, 1998b, Prévost & White 2000). This paper attempts to pursue the first account investigating past tense assignment in L2 English by Japanese speakers and suggests persistent influence of the L1 at the level of syntax in L2 acquisition.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 discusses previous research on past tense assignment in L2 English by learners of various L1 backgrounds and suggests L1 influence in this domain. Section 3 discusses the past tense maker *-ta* in Japanese, suggesting that it is a tense auxiliary rather than a tense affix. In Section 4, the use of past tense assignment in oral production of English by Japanese speakers is investigated. The paper concludes by discussing the domain to which the inconsistent production of surface morphological forms, if any, should be attributed.

2. Previous studies of past tense assignment in L2 English

2.1 A mapping problem

A series of studies by Lardiere (1998a, 1998b) proposes that syntax and morphology develop independently in L2 acquisition. This dissociation between the development of morphophonology and syntactic features goes against the view of recent SLA studies which propose that syntactic knowledge in learners' mental representation reflects corresponding morphophonological knowledge (Eubank 1994; Vainikka and Young-Scholten 1996). Lardiere claims that L2 learners' knowledge of syntax, such as the strength of the AGR feature, is dissociated from that of morphology, and that production rates of verbal inflectional morphology and an underlying syntactic structure are independent of each other.

Lardiere presents longitudinal production data from an adult Chinese near native speaker of English called Patty collected over several years. She found that Patty supplied past tense marking in English only at a rate of 34%, but stably in obligatory contexts throughout the studies. In terms of the corresponding syntax, however, the data shows the

evidence of the acquisition of CP, implying the existence of the lower projections, such as AGRP and TP. This is supported by the fact that she could mark nominative case perfectly, suggesting the acquisition of functional features of T. These findings suggest that development of morphology and syntax are not associated, instead, these two have their own developmental courses. Lardiere concludes that what is problematic for L2 learners is the mapping from syntactic representations onto morphophonological forms or accessing the lexicon.

This argument is robust in that the problem in mapping can account for the stable poor performance on past tense assignment by such an advanced speaker. One can argue, however, that the data also supports the view that L2 syntax is malfunctioning in some way, which causes a persistent failure in realising inflectional morphology. It is possible that Patty's poor assignment of past tense is attributed to the lack of the equivalent syntactic feature in her mental grammar. It is assumed that certain parameterized features of functional categories, which have a different value in L1 and L2, are difficult to reset in L2 (Hawkins 2001; Hawkins and Chan 1997, Franceschina 2001). If this is the case, the problem rather resides in L2 syntax which does not have a specified [\pm past] feature, because it is not established in the L2. The point here is that the data presented by Lardiere is not inconsistent with the view which assumes lack of knowledge of a certain syntactic features in L2.

2.2 L1 influence on surface morphological forms in L2

Stauble (1984) investigates the development of verb morphology in English in the speech of six adult Japanese and Spanish speakers. The participants had been living in the United States for at least 10 years since arrival after the age of 20. The data shows that Spanish speakers differed from Japanese speakers in that they were more accurate in their target-like use of the 3rd person singular present tense agreement marker *-s* than in that of a simple past tense marker *-ed*, while both inflections were not easy for Japanese speakers.

The contrast in performance between Spanish and Japanese advanced speakers can be attributed to the influence of L1. Spanish has a rich system of subject-verb agreement, while Japanese has nothing comparable. It is possible that the influence of L1 is reflected in the difference in assignment of 3rd person singular agreement between Spanish and Japanese speakers. For Spanish speakers, as the L1 has a similar system marking person, the property in the L2 is not problematic, while for Japanese speakers, the L1 does not have a similar agreement system, resulting in difficulty acquiring the property of the L2. If this is the case, one can argue that the unsuccessful performance on surface morphological forms reflects a certain deficiency in the syntactic component.

This is problematic for the mapping account. If L2 learners have the appropriate syntactic representations on these properties, which they just fail to realise morphologically, one needs to give an account of why Spanish speakers exhibited a contrast in performance on person agreement and past tense morphology. It is unlikely that only person agreement is not subject to the mapping problem. It is more plausible to

attribute the difference to syntactic representations, namely, the similar agreement systems between L1 and L2, which contribute to more successful realisation of inflectional morphology in the L2.

It is a bit puzzling, though, why Japanese learners seemed to have a problem in assigning simple past tense, given the fact that Japanese grammaticalises non-past/past tense by tense markers *-(r)u* / *-ta*. It is a wonder why the speakers in Stauble's study performed on past tense assignment as unsuccessfully as on person agreement, considering the fact that the L1 has a specified tense feature. This is predictable in the mapping account, because one can argue that L2 learners had difficulty realising surface inflection of past tense as much as person agreement, as they are both morphological inflectional forms. However, if a syntactic account is to be maintained, one needs to give an account for Japanese speakers' poor performance on past tense realisation. If there are specific characteristics in Japanese which may hinder the assignment of past tense in English, one can still hold the syntactic account.

3. Tense system in Japanese

Japanese has a non-past/past tense contrast marked on predicates by *-(r)u* / *-ta*. They always appear at a verb-final position (Soga 1983, Fukui 1995).

- | | | | |
|-----|----------------|---|-----------|
| (1) | tabe - ru | / | tabe - ta |
| | eat (non-past) | | ate |

These markers might have a similar grammatical status to a tense affix in English: a tense affix being attached to V and dominated by the category VP. However, problems arise if one assumes this analysis. It is suggested below that the marker is more like a tense auxiliary rather than a tense affix posited in the functional category of Infl independent of VP.

3.1 *-ta* as a tense auxiliary

Before discussing a grammatical status of *-ta* as a tense auxiliary, one must consider what characteristics a form must have to be an auxiliary. Akmajian, Steele, and Wasow (1979) defines the category AUX¹ in the following way:

AUX is a category — i.e. distinct in its syntactic behavior from the behavior of other categories — labeling a constituent that includes elements expressing the notional categories of Tense and/or Modality.

(Akmajian, Steele, and Wasow 1979: 51)

¹ It should be noted that the category AUX is similar to what is called a head category Infl in recent literature (Chomsky 1981). Infl dominates bound morphemes such as inflectional affixes of past tense *-ed* and 3rd person singular *-s*, and to which verbs like *be* and *have* are raised from the VP to pick up the inflections (Pollock 1989).

The elements that are found in the node dominated by the category are typically called auxiliaries like *have* and *can* in English. They can be the ones, however, which have no resemblance to verbs whatsoever (Akmajian, Steele, and Wasow 1979: 52). If one follows this definition of the category AUX, the following conditions should be met to propose that the tense marker is a tense auxiliary: (1) the marker is a constituent behaving distinctly from other categories, especially the VP category; (2) the marker expresses the notion of tense and/or modality. The past tense marker in Japanese obviously fulfills the second condition: its primary function is to give a temporal reference to the sentence. It needs to be shown, then, that *-ta* is a constituent and behaves differently from the VP category.

3.2 Evidence

There is evidence which supports the analysis that the tense marker in Japanese is a tense auxiliary, which is placed in Infl distinct from the category V. Firstly, the position of *-ta* is invariantly fixed: it always appears in the verb-final position. Even if it is in a verbal complex, it never intervenes between a main verb and a causative/passive verb. Consider (2) (quoted in Fukui 1995).

- (2) John-ga ringo-o tabe-sase-rare-ta
 John-NOM apple-ACC eat-CAUS-PASS-PST
 "John was made to eat an apple."

The tense marker *-ta* cannot intervene between *tabe* (*eat*) and *sase* (causative) or *sase* and *rare* (passive). If the predicate is adjectival, *-ta* again has to be placed in the verb-final position. Consider (3).

- (3) Niwa-ga hirokat-ta
 garden-NOM spacious-PST
 "The garden was spacious."

It is still not clear from this linear order, however, whether or not *-ta* belongs to Infl. When one considers the position in relation to a negator, however, the analysis of *-ta* as a part of VP causes a problem. When (2) is negated, a negator must be inserted between the verbal complex and *-ta*, as in (4). Similarly, a negator must appear between the adjectival predicate and the past tense marker, as in (5).

- (4) John-wa ringo-o tabe-sase-rare-nakat-ta
 John-TOP apple-ACC eat-CAUS-PASS-NEG-PST
 "John was not made to eat an apple."
- (5) niwa-ga hiroku-nakat-ta
 garden -NOM spacious-NEG-PST
 "The garden was not spacious."

If we assume a projection of NegP in the configuration, the analysis positing *-ta* in the category VP is problematic because, as (4) and (5) show, *-ta* always comes after the negator which is higher than the VP. Thus, it is plausible to consider *-ta* as a property of Infl.

Further evidence is the position in relation to emphatic particles *mo* (*also*) and *sae* (*even*). They occur between a main verb (and a verb complex) and *-ta*. The supportive (*s*)*u* (*do*) needs inserting. Consider (6–8).

- | | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------|----------------------|
| (6) | John-wa | ringo-o | tabe-sae-si-ta | |
| | John-TOP | apple-ACC | eat-even-do-PST | |
| | “John even ate an apple.” | | | |
| | | | | |
| (7) | John-wa | ringo-o | tabe-sase-rare-sae-si-ta. | |
| | John-TOP | apple-ACC | eat-CAUS-PASS-even-do-PST | |
| | “John was even made to eat an apple.” | | | |
| | | | | |
| (8) | John-wa | Mary-ni | ringo-o | tabe-sase-mo-si-ta. |
| | John-TOP | Mary-DAT | apple-ACC | eat-CAUS-also-do-PST |
| | “John also made Mary eat an apple.” | | | |

If we assume the projection of an AdvP of which the emphatic particle is a constituent, it follows that *-ta* is a separate constituent from VP.

Thus, there is plenty of evidence showing that *-ta* should be considered a property of Infl independent of VP. In other words, *-ta* is a tense auxiliary, rather than a tense affix, which directly merges with Infl or T (in the more recent literature). This is consistent with the analysis of Fukui (1995) which claims that Infl in Japanese functions as “a place holder” for the tense marker.

3.3 Absolute / relative tense systems

Another characteristic of the tense system in Japanese is that tense markers can represent ‘completed’ aspect as well as tense (Soga 1984). Consider the examples below in (9–12).

- | | | | | |
|------|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|
| (9) | Taro-wa | Kino | ranti-o | tabe-ta-ka. |
| | Taro-TOP | yesterday | lunch-ACC | eat-PST Q |
| | “Did Taro eat lunch yesterday?” | | | |
| | | | | |
| (10) | Taro-wa | mo | ranti-o | tabe ta ka. |
| | Taro-TOP | already | lunch-ACC | eat-PST-Q |
| | “Has Taro already eaten lunch?” | | | |

- (11) Tabe-nakat-ta.
Eat-NEG-PST
“(He) did not eat.”
- (12) Mada tabe-te-nai.
Yet eat-te-NEG(NPST)
“(He) has not eaten yet.”

(11) is appropriate as an answer to (9), and (12) to (10), but not vice versa. It is because *-ta* in (9) encodes past tense and in (10) represents ‘completed’ aspect. The ‘completed’ aspect *-ta* is also observed in embedded clauses. Compare (13–15).

- (13) Taro-wa Mary-ga hasi-**teiru**-to sira-nakat-ta
Taro-TOP Mary-NOM run-ASP(NPST)-that know-NEG-PST
“Taro did not know that Mary was running.”
- (14) Taro-wa Mary-ga hasi-**ru**-to sira-nakat-ta
Taro-TOP Mary-NOM run-NPST-that know-NEG-PST
“Taro did not know that Mary would run.”
- (15) Taro-wa Mary-ga hasi-**ta**-to sira-nakat-ta
Taro-TOP Mary-NOM run-PST-that know-NEG-PST
“Taro did not know that Mary had run.”

In (13–14), *-teiru* and *-(r)u* appear in the embedded clauses because the eventuality in the clause is simultaneous or posterior to that of the main clauses. In (15), however, when the eventuality presented in the embedded clause is anterior to that of the main clause, *-ta* appears² in the embedded clause (Soga 1984; Machida 1989). In these examples, the relative point of time involving the notion of anteriority or posteriority in relation to the reference time is important. It seems that Japanese is more subject to relative tense, while English retains absolute tense (Comrie 1985). The phenomenon implies that T in subordinate clauses does not always have a temporal reflex in Japanese³. If Japanese speakers retain this representation in English, it may cause a problem. They might wrongly assume that, as in the L1, realising a temporal reflex in subordinate clauses is not obligatory in the L2.

3.4 A tense feature

We assume that in English T contains an abstract tense affix⁴ (Chomsky 1995; Radford

² This is a basic rule for subordinate clauses, but there are cases where *-ta* and *-(r)u* are replaceable.

³ The reason for this is interesting, but it is beyond the realm of this paper.

⁴ “Affix” here is an abstract syntactic notion and different from the term we have used in the previous sections.

1997) which has an interpretable tense feature. In English, it attracts an uninterpretable tense feature from the V head, and agreement between T and V gives rise to the surface reflex *-ed* attached to thematic verbs. Auxiliary verbs are raised from V to T, giving rise to a deictically linked interpretation (Hawkins et al. 2002). In Japanese, it is assumed that lexical features of *-ta* are selected and merged with T directly adjoining to the abstract tense affix, giving rise to the surface reflex *-ta*. There is no verb-raising or T-V agreement necessary to determine tense. Thus, English and Japanese are the same in that T has the features [\pm past] and only the reflex of a [$+$ past] T can have past interpretations, but the way tense is realised is different.

4. Where does the problem reside?

If Japanese speakers exhibit difficulty in past tense marking in English, whether it is serious or minor, there are four possibilities for where the problem might reside.

1) Syntactic problem

Japanese speakers would have no major problem in past tense assignment in English, because T in L1 and L2 have the feature [\pm past]. Should there be a problem, however, they may exhibit difficulty related to V-to-T raising in the L2, considering the absence of it in Japanese. It might be the case that Japanese speakers are able to come to the acquisition of V-to-T raising of auxiliaries in English, but the related semantic consequences of raising, namely, the syntactic determination of a deictically linked interpretation, might be hard to acquire. By contrast, past tense assignment to thematic verbs in English is similar to Japanese in that T and V are interpreted independently by the semantic component (Hawkins et al. 2002). If this is the case, it is predicted that Japanese speakers should exhibit difficulty of past tense assignment more on auxiliary than thematic verbs.

2) Mapping problem

Even though Japanese speakers have acquired the syntax of tense and verb raising in English, they may exhibit a serious problem in the property because they fail to map the syntactic representations to morphological forms, just as the Chinese speaker in Lardiere (1998a, 1998b) does.

3) Selective syntactic problem

Japanese speakers have difficulty marking past tense in subordinate clauses, because in the L1 system, it is not obligatory to mark tense if the verb is marked for aspect. It is predicted that tense marking in subordinate clauses will be worse than that in main clauses.

4) Developmental problem

Past tense assignment may be a developmental problem: less-advanced speakers might have problems to some extent, but they would be overcome eventually. Although T of Japanese and English has the feature [\pm past], the way to realise tense is different: tense

auxiliary vs tense affix. In the course of development, however, Japanese speakers are able to acquire the specific way of marking in the L2.

5. The study

5.1 Participants

Ten adult Japanese speakers learning English participated in the study. They were given an English proficiency test (Oxford Placement Test: Allan, 1992) which consists of three components: an auditory discrimination test and two written grammaticality judgement tests. They were divided into an advanced and intermediate group on the basis of the test. Table 1 summarises information about OPT score and age of the participants in the study. Four of the five advanced speakers had lived in English-speaking countries more than one year (ranging from one to three years) and had been studying at universities in England or in the United States. One advanced speaker and all the five intermediate speakers were studying an area related to English at a university in Japan.

Table 1: Information of OPT score and age of the subjects

Group	N	OPT mean	OPT range	Age range at testing
Advanced	5	175.4	164–189	20–29
Intermediate	5	143.4	139–148	20–22

5.2 Tasks

Three oral production tasks were conducted.

(a) Story telling task

The participants were presented with a series of four to six pictures which told a story. They were asked to create a story based on the pictures and tell a story of their own. They were given one minute to get prepared for it before they started telling the story. For their convenience, a list of vocabulary items relevant to the story was provided just before they started. It was their choice whether or not to make use of the list. There were five series of pictures in total.

(b) Short-story retelling task

The participants listened to short stories read by an English native speaker on tape and were asked to retell the story in their own words and their own time. The length of sentences ranged from 30 to 50 words and the mean length of the story was 38.7 words. Each story was constructed with simple vocabulary and dealt with topics from everyday life so that the participants were able to understand easily. They were encouraged to focus on conveying detailed information they obtained rather than repeating the stories. There were 15 short stories in total, preceded by a practice session. Here are two examples of tested stories.

1. This afternoon we played tennis at the university. We were going to finish before it got

dark, but the game was so heated. We just couldn't stop playing, and we continued until 7 o'clock in the evening.

2. Last night a strange thing happened. I stayed up studying until 2 o'clock in the morning and after that I took a bath, but when I looked at the clock in the bathroom, it was only 1 o'clock.

(c) Free production task

The participants were asked four questions in which they were expected to talk about some event in the past. They were asked about a frightening experience in the past, what they did last Sunday, the happiest moment in the last year, and something they lost recently.

5.3 Method of analysis

Oral productions of the participants in the three tasks were tape-recorded and transcribed later. The accuracy of past tense marking in an obligatory context was calculated and reported in terms of incidents and percentages. If the participant corrected or restated phrases, only the final one was counted.

6. Results

The results of accurate use of the past tense are summarised in Tables 2–5 below. The columns show the numbers of correct tokens of past tense assignment out of total numbers of contexts, and the accuracy in percentages is shown in the next column.

Tables 2–3 show the overall accuracy of past tense assignment in the three tasks by advanced and intermediate speakers. As Table 2 shows, the advanced speakers were nearly perfect in past tense assignment in all the tasks. The intermediate speakers, however, were not as successful as the advanced speakers. As Table 3 shows, they marked past tense around 70% of the time in the Short-story retelling and the Free production task, suggesting that past tense marking is still in the process of development. The much poorer performance in the Story telling task than the other two by the intermediate speakers should be noted, whereas the performance of the advanced speakers did not vary depending on the kind of task. The effect of task is not of a primary concern in this discussion, but it suggests the rigid ability of advanced speakers in the property.

Table 2: Accuracy (in tokens and percentages) of past tense assignment in three tasks by advanced speakers

Task	Story telling		Short-story retelling		Free production	
Total	426/451	94.46%	353/371	95.15%	191/194	98.45%

Table 3: Accuracy (in tokens and percentages) of past tense assignment in three tasks by intermediate speakers

Task	Story telling		Short-story retelling		Free production	
Total	140/311	45.02%	175/242	72.31%	62/85	72.94%

Let's break down the data and have a look at the details. We can see the performance on thematic verbs and auxiliaries separately in Tables 4–5. "Auxiliaries" include copula, *did*, *could*, *would*, *had to*, and so on. Again the results of the advanced speakers did not vary depending on the kind of verbs across the tasks, suggesting the rigid ability in using the property. By contrast, overall, intermediate speakers performed less successfully on auxiliaries than thematic verbs in all the tasks, suggesting that they had difficulty in past tense assignment more on auxiliaries.

Table 4: Accuracy (in tokens and percentages) on thematic verbs and auxiliaries in three tasks by advanced speakers

Task	Story telling		Short-story retelling		Free production	
Thematic verbs	272/286	95.10%	242/253	95.65 %	93/94	98.94%
Auxiliaries	155/165	93.94%	111/118	94.07%	98/100	98.00%
Total	426/451	94.46%	353/371	95.15%	191/194	98.45%

Table 5: Accuracy (in tokens and percentages) on thematic verbs and auxiliaries in three tasks by intermediate speakers

Task	Story telling		Short-story retelling		Free production	
Thematic verbs	102/212	48.11%	131/169	77.51%	44/59	74.58%
Auxiliaries	38/99	38.38%	44/73	60.27%	18/26	69.23%
Total	140/311	45.02%	175/242	72.31%	62/85	72.94%

Tables 6–7 show tokens and accuracy in percentages in subordinate clauses compared to the performance in total. The advanced speakers seemed to perform almost perfectly on this property, as 95% correct in the Story telling task, but when we have a detailed look into the contexts, it was found that they performed much worse in subordinate clauses, as the accuracy dropped to 75 %. Both advanced and intermediate speakers performed worse in past tense assignment in subordinate clauses in both tasks⁵, suggesting that they had more difficulty in tense marking in subordinate clauses than main clauses.

Table 6: Accuracy (in tokens and percentages) in subordinate clauses by advanced speakers

Task	Story Telling		Short-story retelling	
Total	426/451	94.46%	353/371	95.15%
Subordinate clauses	56/75	74.67%	60/71	84.51%

⁵ The number of tokens in subordinate clauses was so small in the Free production task that it was not included here.

Table 7: Accuracy (in tokens and percentages) in subordinate clauses by intermediate speakers

Task	Story Telling		Short-story retelling	
Total	140/311	45.02%	175/242	72.31%
Subordinate clauses	12/35	34.29%	17/36	47.22%

Tables 8–9 show the analysis of absence of past tense marking only. Tables 6–7 suggested that the participants tended to drop marking in subordinate clauses compared to other contexts. Tables 8–9 show how much of them out of all the unmarking actually occurred in subordinate clauses. It turns out that most of the unmarking of advanced speakers occurred in subordinate contexts. For example, in the Story telling task, 19 incidents (76%) out of all the 25 errors of unmarking occurred in subordinate clauses. It suggests that the errors that the advanced speakers made were not random, rather, they occurred systematically in subordinate clauses. It is interesting, however, that this phenomenon was only observed by the advanced speakers. As Table 9 shows, most of the errors that the intermediate speakers made could not be accounted for by the contexts. For example, in the Story telling task, only 23 incidents (13.45%) out of 171 errors occurred in subordinate clauses. It suggests that the unmarking by the intermediate speakers occurred randomly.

Table 8: Unmarking in subordinate clauses out of total unmarking by advanced speakers

Task	Story Telling		Short-story retelling	
Unmarking	19/25	76%	11/18	61.11%

Table 9: Unmarking in subordinate clauses out of total unmarking by intermediate speakers

Task	Story Telling		Short-story retelling	
Unmarking	23/171	13.45%	19/67	28.36%

7. Discussion

The following are the main findings of the study:

1. The performance of the advanced speakers did not vary depending on the kind of task. They assigned past tense almost perfectly where it was obligatory. By contrast, the intermediate speakers marked past tense at most 70% correctly, which varied depending on the task.
2. The performance of the advanced speakers did not vary depending on the kind of verbs across the tasks, whereas the intermediate speakers performed less successfully on auxiliaries than on thematic verbs across the tasks.
3. Both advanced and intermediate speakers performed worse in past tense

assignment in subordinate clauses in the tasks, suggesting that they had more difficulty in tense marking in subordinate clauses than main clauses.

4. Most of the unmarking of advanced speakers occurred systematically in subordinate contexts. This phenomenon was only observed for advanced speakers. Most of the errors that intermediate speakers made spread randomly and could not be accounted for by the contexts.

The overall findings concerning the advanced speakers suggest categorised use of past tense marking. It is unlikely that the mapping problem view can give a good account of this. If there is a mapping problem in past tense assignment in some way, the advanced speakers should not exhibit near-perfect performance, as they showed in 95% target-like use in all the tasks. In addition, if one holds the mapping-problem view, the few cases where they had left the form unmarked should be random errors, but this is not the case, either. As Table 8 shows, 70% of the errors that the advanced speakers made occurred in subordinate contexts, which was predictable from considering the tense system in the L1. Since the L1 does not always mark tense in subordinate clauses, they are assumed to transfer the relative tense system in the L2.

By contrast, the unstable accuracy of past tense assignment by the intermediate speakers in various tasks suggests that they were in the developmental stages of restructuring the property for the L2. In particular, the contrast they exhibited between thematic verbs and auxiliaries was considered to reside in a syntactic phenomenon. In English, linking auxiliaries deictically involves V-to-T raising, which the L1 does not have. It may be the case that the intermediate speakers knew that auxiliaries must be raised from V to T in English, but they did not know the semantic consequences accompanying it, namely, giving rise to a deictic linking (Hawkins et al. 2002)⁶. In fact, in the study no case has been found where an auxiliary was not raised past an adverb from V to T, suggesting that the participants knew that auxiliaries must be raised to T in the L2.

Thus, it has been found that past tense assignment is a developmental issue for Japanese speakers acquiring English. In early stages, they have difficulty in recognising the semantic consequences of V-to-T raising in the L2, and later, the property is overcome in end-state grammars. However, the relative tense system which the L1 often deploys may not be overcome even in later stages, and remains persistently difficult for Japanese speakers.⁷

If there is a mapping problem in the case of past tense assignment by Japanese speakers acquiring English, one needs to give an account for the contrast between the near-perfect performance of the advanced speakers in this study and the persistent difficulty in the case of the Chinese speaker in Lardiere's series of study. It is more

⁶ Hawkins et al. (2002) discusses that if T has the features [\pm past], it blocks the free assignment of past/non-past interpretations; i.e. only the reflex of a [+past] T can have past interpretations. In English, raising of auxiliaries from V to T determines a deictically linked interpretation; i.e. this is a syntactic operation with a semantic consequence.

⁷ I speculate that this is also a syntactic problem, but the explanation for this remains to be addressed.

plausible to give an account for the difference from a syntactic view.

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