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**Japanese Proficiency of JSL Children Born/Raised in Japan:  
Differences in Producing Basic Japanese Verbs  
Compared to Monolingual Children**

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The current study aims to compare productive knowledge of basic Japanese verbs by children who speak Japanese as a second language (henceforth JSL children) and monolingual Japanese children. JSL children, especially those born/raised in Japan from early childhood, are often perceived to have nativelike proficiency in Japanese because of their fluent conversational skills in their second language, Japanese. The current study is motivated by the observation by the authors through their teaching experiences that such children occasionally use Japanese in a non-nativelike manner.

In this study, 924 monolingual Japanese children and 124 JSL children, aged between 10 and 13 years old, completed picture questionnaires that were developed to test their ability to produce 31 basic Japanese verbs. The verbs in the questionnaire include: polysemous verbs such as *kiru* (cut) and *hiku* (pull), clothing verbs such as *kiru* (put on [clothing]), *haku* (put on [footwear, pants etc.]), and *nugu* (take off [clothing etc.]), and other verbs such as *kogu* (row [a boat]) and *taku* (cook [rice]). These verbs are closely tied to everyday life, and are thus considered easy for age-matched monolingual children. The purpose of the study was to investigate whether the JSL children, whose nativelike conversational fluency was confirmed using an independent measure, would be able to produce these verbs as accurately as age-matched monolingual children. Quantitative analysis of the total scores of the questionnaire revealed statistically significant differences between the monolingual and JSL groups. Although there were individual differences within each group, the JSL group had a higher proportion of children whose scores were extremely low (i.e., lower than 2 standard deviation units below the monolingual mean). In addition, the error patterns of individual items revealed the JSL children's limited productive knowledge of verbs that are not frequently used in the school context. Further, some errors were ascribed to misunderstanding of the semantic scope of the verbs, as well as to L1 influence.

We believe that the greatest contribution of our study is that it demonstrates the gap between JSL children's nativelike conversational fluency and the non-nativelike productive knowledge of basic verbs of these JSL children. Such a gap often goes unnoticed, both by teachers and researchers alike, because of the highly proficient conversational skills of the JSL children who had been immersed in a Japanese-language environment from very early childhood. A similar mismatch between surface fluency and more

cognitively demanding language skills is found in the distinction between Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) proposed by Cummins (1979). What distinguishes the gap identified in our study from the BICS/CALP distinction is that the JSL children in our study had problems with verbs that are (very) easy for monolingual children. Using one's mother tongue in an academic contexts is probably not easy even for some monolingual children. We believe that the gap reported in the current study is much more revealing because teachers and researchers may fail to acknowledge—without a research report like the current study—that (some) seemingly natively-like JSL children may not know such easy words.

We also believe that our study makes a great contribution to future research about language development of JSL children. Some of the items on the agenda have already been presented following the publication of this study. First, data for younger JSL and monolingual children who completed the same picture questionnaire were analyzed and reported in Nishikawa, Aoki and Hosono (2016). Second, we had originally excluded the monolingual children in special education classes from the data, but included them in order to triangulate the data among JSL children, monolingual children, and monolingual children in special education (Ikeda, Nishikawa & Aoki, 2016). Third, we have developed a card game (*karuta*) which tries to provide JSL children with ample input on the verbs to which they have limited input, and implemented it at an elementary school (Hosono & Shige, 2016). We look forward to more studies that try to capture the language-related abilities of JSL children from multiple perspectives. The findings of such studies will deepen our understanding of their language development, which will surely lead in turn to better language education for JSL children.

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