Abstract

This study examined the extent to which a battery of task-based language activities helped L1 Japanese lower secondary school students comprehend the construction of L2 English postmodified noun phrases. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of task-based language activities on acquiring English postmodification, regarded as an extremely difficult grammar item for L1 Japanese lower secondary school students to acquire.

Basically, English has an SVO sentence structure, and Japanese has an SOV sentence structure. According to a linguistic typological survey (Greenberg, 1963), the modifying mechanisms are different; SVO languages tend to have postmodification and SOV languages tend to have premodification. Therefore, L1 Japanese speakers have difficulty processing L2 English postmodification as well as the SVO sentence structure.

According to recent surveys on acquiring English postmodification, many Japanese lower secondary school students do not develop an adequate understanding of it, and many Japanese upper secondary school students do not overcome this deficiency. It is notoriously difficult for them to formulate sentences with postmodification when speaking. Another survey showed the effects of task-based language activities on students' production of postmodification. The number of sentences with postmodification in lower secondary school textbooks approved by the government (MEXT) is low (13.2%); therefore, more opportunities

to use postmodification should be provided through instructional intervention.

This study relied on recent SLA research to develop means of effective intervention. In particular, input processing instruction (VanPatten, 1996; 2004; 2012) can trigger intake, and task-based language teaching (Ellis, 2003) can help students enhance their integration and output. The SLA model from input to output in Gass (1997) provides clear procedures to help students acquire postmodification.

Based on a review of the literature, this study was designed as follows. Four language activities (two Task-Oriented Activities, one structured input activity, and one Task Activity were adopted, and four tests were administered. Task-Oriented Activities and Task Activities are types of task-based language activities that Takashima (2000; 2005) proposed as useful communicative activities in the Japanese EFL context.

Task Activities differ from Task-Oriented Activities in that they contain a predetermined dialog. In Task Activities, students must create messages without predetermined dialogs. A structured input activity is a language activity based on processing instruction (VanPatten, 1996; 2004; 2012), an interpretation-based activity to induce form-meaning mapping. Task Activities were specially designed by focusing on different meanings of similarly constructed postmodified noun phrases with their nouns in alternately switched positions. This kind of manipulation was added because intentionally switching nouns in a

postmodified noun phrase was expected to help students notice differences in the construction according to different meanings.

Ninety-one Japanese public lower secondary school students participated in this study, and their comprehension of the construction of postmodified noun phrases was assessed by pre- and posttests on three tests (Test A, Test B, and Test C) and one additional test (Test D). Test A measured their interpretation of the construction of sentences with postmodification. Four choices were offered as descriptions of a corresponding picture. Test B measured their ability to correctly produce a postmodified noun phrase by listening to a Japanese phrase and rearranging given words to make a corresponding English phrase. Test C measured their ability to produce sentences with postmodification. Here they read Japanese sentences and rearranged given words or phrases to make corresponding English sentences. Test D was administered to compare the grammatical knowledge attained in the language activities with that which preceded the treatments. This was a multiple-choice translation test, in which they read English sentences and chose the most appropriate Japanese sentences corresponding to their meaning. A one-way ANOVA and correlation analyses of the results on Tests A, B, C were performed to examine the extent to which the language activities promoted comprehension of the construction of postmodified noun phrases. A two-way ANOVA was performed in Test D.

The results showed that the Task-Oriented Activities and the structured input activity

helped the participants to understand the meaning and construction of postmodified noun phrases (e.g., to distinguish between "the book on the notebook" and "the notebook on the book"), and the Task Activity helped them retain their knowledge. However, when the participants attempted to create complete sentences with postmodification (e.g., The snow domes at Deuprix were 10 euros), in the Task Activity, they did not do well. Eleven months later, after the administration of posttest 2, an additional survey to investigate the same participants' recognition of postmodified noun phrases was conducted. The mean score on Test D in the additional survey was compared with examples in the literature of cases in which no treatments were administered. The results showed significant differences that confirmed the utility of the treatments in this study.

In conclusion, this study confirmed that implementing a battery of task-based language activities is effective when attempting to provide Japanese lower secondary school students with opportunities to use postmodification. Switching nouns in postmodified noun phrases involves understanding the meaning and construction of these phrases, and having L1 Japanese learners notice noun phrases in complete sentences contributes to their comprehension and acquisition. Still, the treatments in this study did not completely succeed in helping the students to formulate their own sentences. To resolve this problem, further studies are required to investigate the effects of corrective feedback and to identify other techniques that can help in the acquisition and retention of postmodification.