Children’s Acquisition of Sluicing Constructions in Japanese
Akari Ohba¹, Hiroyuki Shimada² and Kyoko Yamakoshi¹
Ochanomizu University¹ and Meiji Gakuin University²

1.Introduction: This study examines the structure of sluicing in child Japanese. We compare two types of Japanese sluicing: pronominal sluicing (JPS) and standard sluicing (JSS) (Nakao&Yoshida 2005, Takita 2010). This study investigates whether children know the structural difference between JPS and JSS by examining the acceptability of strict and sloppy readings. Our results show that Japanese children know the difference, which does not seem to be acquired from their input.

2.Sluicing in Japanese: Sluicing is an ellipsis in which wh-phrases remain ((1)) (Ross 1969, Merchant 2001). In particular, we focus on two types of Japanese sluicing: Japanese pronominal sluicing (JPS) involving the pronoun sore-ga (‘it-Nom’) ((2)) and Japanese standard sluicing (JSS) without the pronoun sore-ga ((3)). In standard sluicing, the wh-phrase is case-marked or not. We use non-case-marked standard sluicing to compare it with pronominal sluicing, which allows only a non-case-marked wh-phrase (Hiraiwa&Ishihara 2012). Since Japanese is a pro-drop language, it is possible to assume that JSS is derived from JPS with sore-ga replaced by a null pronoun pro. However, JPS allows only strict readings ((2)), whereas JSS allows both strict and sloppy readings (Fukaya&Hoji 1999) ((3)). This difference cannot be explained by only assuming pro in JSS. Under Hiraiwa&Ishihara (2012), this difference is accounted for because JSS is derived from a non-case-marked cleft and an ellipsis ((4)).

3.Prediction&Experiment: The question is whether children know the structural difference between JPS and JSS. Because JPS includes an overt pronoun, children may always analyze the structure of JSS as the one including pro. It seems implausible to acquire the difference from their input. If children only assume pro in JSS, we expect that children do not allow sloppy readings for JSS. If children assume both pro and ellipsis in JSS, we predict that they allow both strict and sloppy readings. Our experiment examined whether children accepted strict and sloppy readings for JSS. We also tested whether children accepted only strict readings and rejected sloppy readings for JPS.

We divided 18 Japanese-monolingual children (4;3-6;11, mean=5;6) into two groups and used the Truth Value Judgment Task. In the first group (G1), we tested JPS with sore-ga ‘it-Nom’ ((6a,b)). In the second group (G2), we tested JSS without sore-ga ((6a,c)). After the child was told a story with pictures ((5)), the child judged whether the test sentence was true or false.

4.Results&Discussion: The children in G1 accepted sloppy readings for JPS only 16.7% of the time(3/18), which means that they accepted only strict readings for JPS for most of the time. In contrast, the children in G2 accepted sloppy readings for JSS 72.2% of the time (13/18). The difference between G1 and G2 is statistically significant (Mann-Whitney U Test, U=13.5, p<.01). The results suggest that the Japanese children know the structural difference between JSS and JPS, even though the elided part is not phonologically given in the input. Our experiment shows that 1) Japanese children know the interpretational differences between JSS and JPS, and 2) they know the case that JSS includes ellipsis. (498 words)
<Appendix>


John bought something, but I don’t know [CP what [IP John bought t]]

(1) Taro-wa [zibun-ga nani-o mora-tta ka] sitteiru ga,
Taro-Top self-Nom what-Acc receive-Past Q know but
Hanako-wa [sore-ga nani (da) ka] sira-nai. (Japanese Pronominal Sluicing)
Hanako-Top it-Nom what (Copula) Q know-not.
‘Taro knows what he received, but Hanako does not know what.’
(Strict reading: ok what Taro received / Sloppy reading: * what Hanako received)

(2) Taro-wa [zibun-ga nani-o mora-tta ka] sitteiru ga,
Taro-Top self-Nom what-Acc receive-Past Q know but
Hanako-wa [nani-o (da) ka] sira-nai. (Japanese Standard Sluicing)
Hanako-Top what(-Acc) (Cop) Q know-not
‘Taro knows what he received, but Hanako does not know what.’
(Strict reading: ok what Taro received / Sloppy reading: ok what Hanako received)

(3) Taro-wa [zibun-ga nani-o mora-tta ka] sitteiru ga,
Taro-Top self-Nom what-Acc receive-Past Q know but
Hanako-wa [nani-o (da) ka] sira-nai. (Japanese Standard Sluicing)
Hanako-Top what(-Acc) (Cop) Q know-not
‘Taro knows what he received, but Hanako does not know what.’
(Strict reading: ok what Taro received / Sloppy reading: ok what Hanako received)

(5) **Story:** A cow and a mouse both received a present. The cow opened his present because he could not wait. The mouse did not open his present because he decided to open it after going back to his house. But the cow wanted to know what the mouse received, so he asked the mouse to open his present. The mouse refused the cow’s request though, so the cow gave up asking.

(6) **Examples of Test Sentences for Group 1 (False) and Group 2 (True/False)**

a. Nezumisan-wa zibun-ga nani-o morat-ta ka mite-nai kedo,
Mouse-Top self-Nom what-Acc receive-Past Q look-Neg but

b. **Group 1:** Usisan-wa [sore-ga nani ka] mi-ta yo.(Pronominal sluicing)
Cow-Top it-Nom what Q look-Past SFP
‘The mouse did not look at what he received, but the cow looked at what it is.’
(Strict reading: * what the mouse received / Sloppy reading: * what the cow received)

c. **Group 2:** Usisan-wa [nani ka] mi-ta yo. (Non-CM Standard Sluicing)
Cow-Top what Q look-Past SFP
‘The mouse did not look at what he received, but the cow looked at what
(Strict reading: * what the mouse received / Sloppy reading: * what the cow received)

**Table 1: Children’s acceptance rates of strict and sloppy readings**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (Number of G1/G2)</th>
<th>Group 1 (JPS)</th>
<th>Group 2 (Non-CM JSS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strict</td>
<td>sloppy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year-olds(N=2/ N=2)</td>
<td>75.0% (3/4)</td>
<td>25.0% (1/4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-year-olds(N=4/ N=3)</td>
<td>100% (8/8)</td>
<td>12.5% (1/8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-year-olds(N=3/ N=4)</td>
<td>100% (6/6)</td>
<td>16.7% (1/6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total (N=9/ N=9)| **94.4%** (17/18) | **16.7%** (3/18) | **88.9%** (16/18) | **72.2%** (13/18) |

Adults (N=6/N=6) | 100% (12/12) | 0.0% (0/12) | 75.0% (9/12) | 91.7% (11/12) |