

氏 名	: 佐藤 選
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論文審査委員	: (主査) 教授 馬場 哲生 (副査) 教授 鈴木 猛 教授 西垣 知佳子 教授 武田 ちあき 教授 濱田 豊彦

学 位 論 文 要 旨

The purpose of this research is to clarify whether or not connective expressions are effective for Japanese EFL (English as a foreign language) learners' comprehension of contexts. Most previous research on connective expressions has focused on their classifications, learners' acquisition of them, and the effect of the expressions on learners' comprehension of contexts. However, significant weaknesses characterize the literature: there has been no classification based on acquisition difficulty; previous studies have not revealed the factors affecting learners' acquisition of connective expressions; and there has been little explanation of inconsistent results in the literature on the effects of connective expressions in texts on comprehension. The current research examined three hypotheses, focusing on the two connective expressions "but" and "so": (1) the English adversative connective expression "but" in texts would have a positive effect on Japanese EFL learners' comprehension of contexts, while the effects of the causal/conjunctive connective expression "so" might be limited; (2) the difference of the effects depending on the expression type would result from that of their meaning recognition of each expression; and (3) the frequency and other features of connective expressions in textbooks and other materials would influence the difference of the effects and meaning recognition. In addition, the current research aimed to assess whether the hypotheses above were specific to Japanese EFL learners or not and whether they were word-specific or relation-specific. The current research consisted of three studies, followed by general discussion.

Study 1

The study investigated how Japanese EFL learners recognize the meanings of the connective expressions "but" and "so." The lower English-proficiency group of 470 Japanese university students and the higher English-proficiency group of 197 Japanese university

students completed a questionnaire on the meanings of “but” and “so” with Japanese expressions. In addition, the lower English-proficiency group of 302 Japanese university students and the higher English-proficiency group of 101 Japanese university students completed a questionnaire on the meanings of “but” and “so” with Japanese passages. Similarly, 11 native English speakers completed a questionnaire on the meanings of “but” and “so” with English passages. The results showed that Japanese EFL learners were likely to understand that “but” is a connective expression representing an adversative relationship. On the other hand, they were less likely to understand the meaning of “so,” which they considered broader than dictionaries’ descriptions. They also tended to understand the meaning of “but” at a certain level regardless of their English proficiency. On the other hand, learners with lower proficiency tended to consider the meaning range of “so” more broadly. Furthermore, there were more individual differences in the judgment standard regarding accepting “so” within both Japanese EFL learners and native English speakers than regarding accepting “but.” These findings indicate that Japanese EFL learners can recognize the meaning range of “but” more appropriately than that of “so,” suggesting that they might be able to acquire the meanings of “but” more easily than that of “so.”

Study 2

The purpose of Study 2 is to clarify how connective expressions appear in Japanese EFL learners’ English textbooks and other materials. The study examined the frequency and the meaning range of “but,” “so,” and other related words in 18 junior high school textbooks (six kinds of each grade), 48 entrance examinations of public high schools, and 10 entrance examinations of national universities (the Center Test). It also examined the first appearance of “but” and “so” in junior high school textbooks. The results showed that “but” as a connective expression appeared more often than “so” as a connective expression in all three kinds of materials. As for the entrance examinations, both the paper and the audio script had the same tendency. The first appearance of “but” as a connective expression was unified in the first half of the first year in all textbooks, and all the first instances of “but” appeared in an adversative relationship. On the other hand, the first time “so” appears as a connective expression was not unified in textbooks, and it is likely to appear later than “but.” The meaning and function of the first “so” also differs depending on textbooks, and its meaning range tends to be broader than that of “but.” These findings indicate that textbooks and entrance examinations show the relationship between the appearance of “but” and an adversative relationship more clearly than that between the appearance of “so” and a causal/conjunctive relationship, suggesting that “but” might work strongly as a marker for Japanese EFL learners to understand English passages.

Study 3

The study investigated the relationship between Japanese EFL learners' meaning recognition of "but/so" and the expressions' effects on comprehending contexts. Three hundred and five Japanese university students with low English proficiency completed three tasks: a Japanese translation test, a TF test, and a questionnaire on the meanings of "but" and "so" with Japanese expressions. Both tests' results showed that the appearance of "but" as a connective expression in English passages was likely to contribute to the students' understanding of the passages. The influence was strong, especially for the learners who recognized that "but" represents an adversative relationship. On the other hand, the appearance of "so" as a connective expression in English passages was less likely to contribute to their understanding of the passages, and the influence did not significantly differ depending on their meaning recognition of "so." Their translations' analysis showed that they did not tend to include Japanese expressions corresponding to the connective expression "so," suggesting that Japanese EFL learners might pay little attention to the word when they read English passages. These results indicate that connective expressions' explicit appearance in English passages might influence Japanese EFL learners' comprehension, and the influence's extent might depend on the expression. The influence might also be related to their recognition of the expression's meanings, and the strength of the relationship might differ depending on the expression.

General Discussion

The current research partially supports hypotheses 1 to 3. These findings suggest that Japanese EFL learners might strongly relate the word "but" to an adversative relationship in their interlanguage at the early learning stage; thus, "but" in passages might function as a marker of an adversative relationship, leading to better comprehension for learners. Meanwhile, "so" might not influence their comprehension despite their incorrect recognition of its meaning or appearance in textbooks and other materials. The results also present the possibility that "so" does not influence learners' reading comprehension regardless of their recognition of it. The discussion indicates that their mother language, Japanese, is a factor behind the difference in the extent of acquisition and effect, depending on the expression. This also indicates that the tendency to recognize the meaning of "but" and "so" might not differ depending on the mother language. Furthermore, the discussion suggests that the findings on "but" could be generalized to other adversative expressions such as "however" or the adversative relationship without explicit connective expressions, while the findings on "so" might be word-specific because of some characteristics specific to the word. The implications of these findings for English education in Japan and further research on connective expression acquisition are discussed.