

FORM ACQUISITION OF THAI STUDENTS STUDYING JAPANESE LANGUAGE.

Premvadee Na Nakornpanom

*Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University,
Bangkok, Thailand,
E-Mail: premvadee.na@ssru.ac.th*

ABSTRACT

Japanese verb conjugations are studied by many researchers; especially conjugation of verb -te form since it is used as conjugations to create other tenses or grammatical expressions in Japanese. In addition, it was reported that the verb - te form was a big challenge for students studying Japanese language as their foreign language. Therefore, this study focused on study in what extent Thai beginners of Japanese acquire the te - form acquisition. The research used a combination of qualitative and quantitative means for data collection with 30 second - year students majoring in English. The results revealed that the difficulty of - te form acquisition for the students depends on forms. They used overgeneralization to the verbs when they were not sure in which group the word belongs to. It indicated that rule-based knowledge is essential for students' acquisition of verb-te form.

Keywords: Acquisition, Japanese language, Conjugation, Forms

INTRODUCTION

Japanese verbs have inflection and have several forms so teaching Japanese verb conjugation to students is not only a big challenge for lecturers but also a hard work for students to memorize. Japanese verbs are divided according to the way they are conjugated, and the verb forms are not affected by their subject. Concerning verb tenses in Japanese, there are only non-past and past, present and future tenses are the same.

In learning Japanese, the system of verbal inflections in Japanese emerges early [1] such as the -te form which is reported as being difficult for Japanese language learners. However, learning the -te form is very useful since it is used as conjugations to create other tenses or grammatical expressions. The -te form is basically used to expressing ongoing actions (-te iru). The -te form is also used to connect verbs together in a sequence (-te-te), prepare actions for the future (-te oku), express trial action (-te miru), and express a desire to have someone do something (-te hoshii). In addition, the -te form is used for making requests (-te kudasai), asking permission (-temo iidesuka), expressing complete actions, or unintentional actions, or regretful actions (-te shimau), expressing during states (-te iru), expressing resultant states (-te aru), and showing an action oriented toward or from someplace (-te iku, -te kuru).

As previously mentioned, the - te form is one of the most used and important conjugations in Japanese grammar, therefore it was studied by many researchers. The difficult levels of te- inflections depend on forms [2]. It was reported that the native Chinese speakers could apply the te-forms inflection rules to nonsense verbs even for a period of only four months of Japanese study [3]. It indicated that grammatical knowledge and rule-based knowledge is strongly effected students' acquisition of verb-te form. This is interesting point to further study in what extent Thai beginners of Japanese acquire the verb te- form acquisition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Verb conjugations in Japanese can be predicted if the learners know how to categorize the verbs. Japanese verb always contain two parts: a verb base (stems) and a suffix. As we can see in the following example: *iku* (行く), the stem is “ik” and the suffix is “u”, and it was called the plain form or the dictionary form. Japanese verbs are divided into three groups: regular verbs I (godan verbs), regular verbs II (ichidan verbs) and irregular verbs [4]. The dictionary form of a regular I verb has a consonant plus u ending: -u (*kau*), -ku (*kaku*), -gu (*oyogu*), -su (*hanasu*), -tsu (*matsu*), -nu (*shinu*), -bu (*tobu*), -mu (*yomu*), and -ru (*toru*), and they make up the largest group of Japanese verbs. There are five sub-groups of verbs inside a regular I verb. These sub-groups have different sound changes in the -te form depending on their final letter. Verbs in each sub-group ending have the same rules as shown in the following.

Table 1
Regular verbs I -u ending and -te form conjugation

ku く	gu ぐ	su す	tsu っ	nu ぬ	bu ぶ	mu む	ru る	u う
---------	---------	---------	----------	---------	---------	---------	---------	--------

Sub-group	Conjugation	Sub-group	Conjugation	Sub-group	Conjugation
u う, tsu つ, ru る	-tte-って	nu ぬ, bu ぶ, mu む	-nde-んで	ku く	-ite-いて Exception: <i>iku</i> 行く → -itte -いって
gu ぐ	-ide-いで	su す	-shite- して		

The conjugation of regular verbs II is simple and easy to remember. The dictionary form of the verb has a vowel: -e or -i plus -ru ending as in *miru* みる to see and *neru* ねる to sleep. Therefore only we drop the -ru ending and add -te to the stem, the conjugation is completed, for example, *mite* みて, *nete* ねて.

Japanese has only two irregular verbs: *kuru* くる to come and *suru* する to do. The verbs are also called the *suru*-verb, and they have exceptions to the -te form rules. They conjugate differently instead of simply dropping the ru and adding a te. They each have their own method: *suru* する to do becomes *shite* して, and *kuru* to come くる becomes *kite* きて.

A number of relevant studies on the error analysis in learning a second language or a foreign language are presented. Recent research in the field of applied linguistics, students' errors in second language learning are viewed as valuable evidence for a creative process of students in language learning. The error occurrence could be used to identify and describe the various strategies which students used in learning [5]. Such an analysis could provide insight understanding how much the learners have learnt and how much they have yet to learn, and find causes of such errors [6]. The errors in accuracy are often related to the system of language inflection [7]. Students make a high percentage of errors of inflection [8]. In order to understand how and why the types of errors occur and to find ways to alleviate problem, the errors which students made should be analyzed.

The verb te- form inflection was reported as being difficulty for Japanese language learner but this was not the case for Chinese speaker learning Japanese. One hundred and two native Chinese speakers learning Japanese acquire verb inflections during only a four month period at a university in China. Participants were tested on te-form verb inflections which were reported as being very difficult for Japanese language learners [9]. The verbs were taken from four sources: verbs from students' textbook, verbs not in the textbook, nonsense verbs created by the authors, and recently coined verbs. The students were asked to write the te-form inflections of 54 verbs. The result revealed that verbs taken from the textbook and used in the classroom were better than those from other categories. The difficult levels of the verb te- inflections depending on forms, and -nde form displayed low performance while -tte form showed high performance of accuracy.

The issues in second language acquisition often claim that adult L2 learners often make error. Some of them are similar to the errors children make during their L1 acquisition whereas others are different from those of L1 children. Studying of learners' errors could throw some light on how learners process language input as the errors themselves could be to some extent representative of the learners' intake, namely, how much the learners have learnt and how much they have yet to learn.

METHODOLOGY

1. Participants

Forty second - year students majoring in English of Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University were used as subjects within the 18 to 20 age range. The students learn Japanese language as a minor, fulfilling a degree requirement. They were enrolled in Elementary Japanese 2 when the study was conducted. The responses of ten were rejected due to their background in learning Japanese language (1 to 3 years in high school or a language school). Finally, 30 students with no experience in learning Japanese before studying in the university were chosen to participate in the study.

2. Procedures

The research used a combination of qualitative and quantitative means of data collection. Qualitative data

were collected from Japanese textbooks, and from the student interview. Based on investigation of *-masu form* verbs presented in Chapter 10 of Manabou! Nihongo Shokyuu 1, 53 verbs were found. After careful consideration, 20 verbs ending with -ru, consist of 9 words from regular verbs I (godan verbs), 9 words from regular verbs II (ichidan verbs) and 2 words from irregular verbs (suru verbs) were used in the test. The verb is given in its polite form (masu form) with the plain form (dictionary form) in brackets. The test was completed in 20 minutes in the Japanese class at the end of the first semester of 2019 academic year.

The study focus on the verb te - form. The interview was conducted in Thai language face to face after the study to find out how the students knew how to change the verbs into the - te form.

RESULTS

The results showed the percentage of accuracy of verb inflections to the -te form in three groups by students. It was revealed that the verbs in irregular verbs were correctly inflected at 65 % (Table 2), regular verbs II at 53.37 % (Table 3) and regular verbs I at 27.78% (Table 4).

Table 1 showed that benkyoushimasu (benkyousuru *to study*) was correctly inflected by 83.33% of students while kimasu (kuru *to come*) was 46.67%.

Table 2
Irregular Verbs

No.1	Verbs	Frequency	Percentage
1.	benkyoushimasu (benkyousuru)	25	83.33
2.	kimasu (kuru)	14	46.67
	average		65

Table 2 revealed the correct inflection of the verbs in the category of regular verbs II to the -te form. Most of students (76.67%) could correctly inflect kakemasu (kakeru *to hang*) and tabemasu (taberu *to eat*), 73.33 % to nemasu (neru *to sleep*) and hajimemasu (hajimeru *to start*), and 6.67% to orimasu (oriru *to get off*).

Table 3
Regular Verbs II

No.1	Verbs	Frequency	Percentage
1.	kakemasu (kakeru)	23	76.67
2.	tabemasu (taberu)	23	76.67
3.	nemasu (neru)	22	73.33
4.	hajimemasu (hajimeru)	22	73.33
5.	dekakemasu (dekakeru)	21	70.00
6.	kimasu (kuru)	13	43.33
7.	mimasu (miru)	13	43.33
8.	okimasu (okuru)	5	16.67
9.	orimasu (oruru)	2	6.67
	average		53.33

Table 3 described the students' conjugating for verbs in regular verb I to the -te form. Most of students (36.67 %) could inflect the verb - urimasu (uru *to sell*) correctly, 33.33 % to kirimasu (kuru *to cut*), 30.30% to kaburimasu (kaburu *to wear*), ganbarimasu (ganbaru *to do my best*) and torimasu (toru *to take*) equally. In contrast, only 10% of students could conjugate the verb imasu (iru *to exist*) to the - te form correctly.

Table 4
Regular Verbs I

No.1	Verbs	Frequency	Percentage
1.	urimasu (uru)	11	36.67
2.	kirimasu (kuru)	10	33.33
3.	kaburimasu (kaburu)	9	30.00
4.	ganbarimasu (ganbaru)	9	30.00
5.	torimasu (toru)	9	30.00
6.	shirimasu (shiru)	8	26.67
7.	hashirimasu (hashiru)	8	26.67
8.	tsukurimasu (tsukuru)	8	26.67
9.	imasu (iru)	3	10.00
	average		27.78

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The results revealed that the errors of conjugating verb to the -te form made by the students depends on forms, in which supported the result of the previous study to the Chinese students. As previously mentioned all verbs in this study end in the hiragana character-ru therefore they appear to be regular verbs II (ichidan verbs), and this caused the verbs in regular verbs I (godan verbs) are not immediately recognizable. The students did not comprehend whether a verb ending in -ru belongs to regular verbs II or regular verb I. They simply dropped -ru and added -te to the verb stem without consideration of common exception of the verbs in regular verbs I. They also used this overgeneralization to the verbs in irregular verbs. The results from the interview also revealed that overgeneralization was used by most of students when they were not sure in which group the word belongs to. It indicated that rule-based knowledge is essential for students' acquisition of verb-te form.

The verbs used in the study were collected from only one chapter in the textbook therefore the results could not generalize. In the future work, much wide range of verbs should be collected, and should cover the verbs in 5 sub-groups in regular verbs I (godan verbs).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Suan Sunandha Rajabhat University for invaluable help throughout this research.

REFERENCES

- [1] Clancy, M, Patricia.(1986). *'The Acquisition of Japanese'* in The Crosslinguistic Study of Language Acquisition: Theoretical Issues. Edited by Dan Isaac Slobin, University of California, Berkely. Psychology Press.
- [2] Chu, Xiang Juan, Katsuo Tamaoka and Yuko Yamato. 2012. Shokyū chūgokujin nihongo gakushūsha no te-kei shūtoku [Acquisition of te-form by native Chinese speakers learning Japanese at the beginner's level]. Nihon Kyōka Kyōiku Gakkaishi [The Bulletin of Japanese Curriculum Research and Development]. 35(2). 63–72 Ibid.
- [3] Kamiya, Takeo (2001). The Hand Book of Japanese Verbs. Kadansha International.
- [4] Touchie, Hanna. (1986). Second Language Learning Errors: Their Types, Causes and Treatment. JALT Journal, Volume 8, No. 1.
- [5] Pooneh, Heydari and Mohammad S. Bagheri. (2012). Error Analysis: Sources of L2 Learners' Errors. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, Vol. 2, No. 8, pp. 1583-1589, August 2012. Academy Publisher.
- [6] Corder, S. P. (1981). Error Analysis and Interlanguage. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [7] Yordchim, Suwaree and Gibbs, J.Toby. (2014). Error Analysis of English Inflection among Thai University
- [8] Students. World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology International Journal of Social, Management, Economics and Business Engineering Vol:8 No:7, 2014
- [9] Nakayama, Mineharu., Ed. (2015). Handbook of Japanese Psycholinguistics. Walter de Gruyter.