

Acquisition of Imperative 'Te' form in Children's Early Japanese

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This is a preliminary study for acquisition of Imperative 'te' form in early Japanese. First, we argued that 'te' form is generated as one of functional categories, INFL or Tense in Japanese according to the position of another functional category, NEG. Then, we suggested that early grammars should have functional categories. If our assumption is correct and if 'te' form can be seen in early Japanese, we could show evidence against Radford's (1990) analysis that a child's initial clauses has no functional projections. In order to illustrate it, we have collected data in early Japanese from three children in Montreal for just about one month. This is short-term but the results provided us with positive evidence for our proposal.

Key words: [early Japanese] [Language acquisition] [Continuity theory]
[Functionary categories] [Imperative 'te' form]

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1. Introduction

We have a verbal form, what is called, 'te' form in Japanese as you can see below¹:

- (1) Watashi wa ame ga fut-te hoshii.
I Top rain Nom fall-te want
'I hope that it will rain.' (*I want rain to fall.)
- (2) Kore ake-te (kudasai).
this open-te (please)
'(Please) Open this.'

In (1), *te* functions as a connector of an embedded predicate, *furu* ('fall') with a main predicate, *hoshii* ('want'). In (2), *te* functions as an euphemistic imperative when we ask somebody to do something for us. We omit *kudasai* ('please') following *aket-te* in an informal style.

Various opinions on the positioning of *te* in Japanese have been discussed in syntactic theories. Some research assumes that *te* is just a part of verbal conjugation (cf. McCawley and Momoi (1986)). Other research assumes that *te* is generated in INFL or Tense and it is an

¹ Abbreviations used in the glosses are as follows:

Top=topic, Nom=nominative Case, NEG=nagator, Asp=Aspect

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infinitive marker corresponding to *to* in English.² Although we do not have much empirical support to determine the syntactic position of *te*, the data of negation of (2) type i.e., imperative *te* in early Japanese, which we are looking at in this paper, suggests that *te* be assumed to be under INFL. If it is the case, the data also provides us with an evidence for a theory of L1A.

Assuming that *te* is under INFL, the existence of *te* form in children's spontaneous speech suggests that a child's grammar may contain not only lexical projections but also functional projections from the onset. In other words, if our assumption is correct, early Japanese data show some conflicts with Radford's (1990) analysis that a child's initial clauses are VPs and they include no functional projections. In this paper, we maintain continuity hypothesis against maturation hypothesis, though we are not discussing whether our position belongs to strong continuity or weak continuity because the data which we have focused on in this paper do not provide us with enough evidence to argue for the one and against the other. This paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we will predict the position of negator in an imperative sentence such as (2) according to two possible syntactic positions of *te*. In section 3, we will show our observation of spontaneous speech by three Japanese children, ranging from 1 year and 9 months old to 3 years and 9 months old and discuss the result and implication of our observation. Finally, in section 4, we will summarize our findings.

2. Assumptions and prediction

Imperative sentences with *te* form which we are focusing on as a grammatical form in this paper are sentences such as in (2). We will repeat (2) below:

- (3)(=2) Kore ake-te (kudasai).
this open-te (please)
'(Please) Open this.'

We can have two possible analyses for the syntactic position of *te*. As we mentioned in section 1, one is that *te* is a part of a verbal conjugation. Henceforth, we shall call this the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis. The other is that *te* is under INFL or Tense. We shall call this option the functional 'te' hypothesis. As we will see below, though we have little production data of negated sentences by younger Japanese children, it would be worth considering different prediction of the position of negator with imperative 'te' forms which the two hypotheses hold.

² As another alternative, some maintain that *te* is generated in Comp. We are not considering this option in this paper because the prediction of NEG position under Comp hypothesis might be the same as that of INFL or Tense hypothesis in our discussion below.

Suppose that 'te' forms could be often seen in early Japanese. The verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis conforms to Radford's (1990) analysis in that child grammars contain only VP and no functional projections. On the other hand, the functional 'te' hypothesis is compatible with Peoppel and Wexler (1993), Clahsen et al (1995) and others in that functional projections are available in early child grammars. However, the existence of imperative *te* form in early Japanese does not provide enough evidence for us to decide which analysis is the most plausible of the two. Therefore, we will consider the position of a negator, *nai* in (3). The two hypotheses yield different predictions.

As Pollock (1989) discussed, we are not sure whether *nai*, the negator has its own projection (i.e., NEGP) or the negator adjoints to VP, but we will just assume the former in this paper. Let us look at the negation of a simple sentence in Japanese.

- (4) *Watashi wa gakkō e ika-na-i.*
 I Top school to go-NEG-Tense
 'I don't go to school.'

As (4) shows, NEG *nai* appears between a verb *ik* ('go') and a Tense *i*. Therefore, if *te* is a part of a verbal conjugation (*akeru* 'open'), *nai* is supposed to appear immediately after *ake-te* in (3) since the negator occurs between a verb and a tense marker (cf. Depréz and Pierce (1993)).

- (5) *Kore ake-te nai (kudasai).*
 this open-te NEG (please)
 '(Please) Don't open this.'

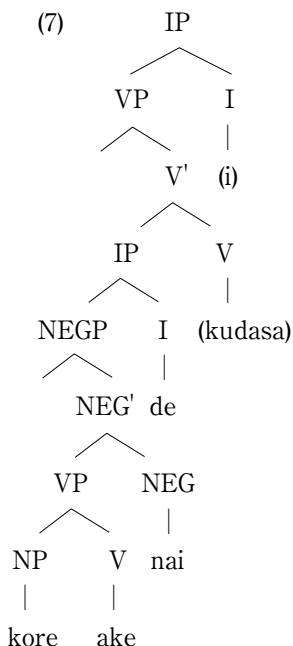
Since *ake-te* as a constituent is assumed to be a verb, NEG appears just after *ake-te*. Though (5) is ungrammatical in adult Japanese, we suppose that a child assumes (5) as grammatical if he or she produces (5), following Harris and Wexler (1996)³. If Radford's (1990) view is correct in that early languages have no functional categories and if a Japanese child assumes that *ake-te* is a verbal constituent in (5), we predict that we could see negated sentences with imperative *te* form like (5) in children's spontaneous speech. If it is the case, child grammars are temporarily different from adult grammars. We have to explain how children go through this temporal stage and finally learn a correct form of negation with imperative 'te' forms.

Furthermore, as we will see below, we would not expect the correct negation with imperative *te* forms such as in (6) under the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis since NEG morpheme *nai* can not mediate within a verbal morpheme. On the other hand, if *te* is generated in INFL or Tense, we correctly have the negation of (3).

³ If (5) is not a negated sentence with imperative *te* form but a negated sentence with an aspectual verb, *iru* adding the contraction of 'i' of '*iru*', (5) turns out to be grammatical in adult Japanese. However, this case totally has a different context from the case with imperative *te* form.

- (6) Kore **ake-nai-de** (kudasai).
 this open-NEG-te (please)
 '(Please) don't open this.'

Nai appears between a verb *ake* and a tense marker (INFL) *de (te)* parallel with the negation of a simple sentence such as in (4). (6) is grammatical in adult Japanese in contrast to (5). Therefore, we assume that *te* is generated under INFL or Tense and that the structure of (6) is as follows:



If this is the case, the existence of imperative *te* form in early Japanese may suggest that early grammars contain functional projections as adult grammars do. Furthermore, early grammars never violate principles in UG. Thus, we are taking a position of continuity hypothesis rather than Radford's (1990) structure-building hypothesis (cf. Guilfoyle and Noonan (1992)) and Felix's (1992) maturation hypothesis.

Before closing this section, we have to mention another use of *te*. *Te* is also used as mediation between an embedded verb and a main aspectual verb, *iru*. Let us consider sentences with this *te* below.

- (8) a. Taro ga suwatte iru.
 Taro Nom sitting Asp
 'Taro is sitting.'

- b. Taro ga suwat-te **i-na-i**.
 Taro Nom sitting-te Asp-NEG-Tense
 'Taro is not sitting.'
- c. Taro ga **suwara-nai-de iru**.
 Taro Nom sit-NEG-te Asp
 'Taro is in a state of not sitting.'

NEG can appear such as in either (8b) or (8c). In (8b), NEG *nai* appears above the main aspectual verb *i-* and below a tense marker *-i*. In contrast to the negation of imperative *te*, whichever we assume the functional 'te' hypothesis or the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis, we correctly predict the position of the negator. Since we do not have a negator between an embedded verb and a main verb, the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis does not incorrectly predict the position of negator such as in (9).

- (9)* Taro ga suwat-te na- iru.
 Taro Nom sit-te NEG-Asp
 'Taro is in a state of not sitting.'

In this case, since we do not have *te* forms that have nothing to do with negation, we can not decide which assumption is better, the functional 'te' hypothesis or the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis.

On the other hand, in (8c), as we have seen the negation of sentences with imperative *te* in (6), NEG appears between the embedded verb, *suwar-*('sit') and *de(te)*. In contrast to (8b), though the functional 'te' hypothesis can correctly predict the position of negator in (8c), the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis does not expect the position of the negator in (8c). As we mentioned above in (8b), because NEG can not appear between embedded verbs and main verbs such as in (9), the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis does not incorrectly assume (9) as grammatical, either. However, the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis does not predict (8c) exclusively. Thus, if we assume the functional 'te' hypothesis, we correctly have NEG between embedded verbs and *te* such as in (8c). Although the functional 'te' hypothesis correctly predicts the position of negator in both (8b) and (8c), the verbal conjugation hypothesis can also correctly predict the position of negator in (8b). Therefore, we are focusing on imperative 'te' not aspectual 'te' in this paper.⁴

In sum, we assume that *te* is under INFL or Tense and that child's grammars contain functional projections from the onset. Thereby, we predict that we will not have negated sentences such as in (5) where a negator appears immediately after a verb + *te* in spontaneous

⁴ We call *te* in (8) as aspectual 'te' for convenience.

speech by Japanese children. Rather, we predict that we can see negated sentences such as in (6) where the negator correctly occurs between the verb and *te* in early Japanese. In section 3, in order to support our claims, we will show our observation of spontaneous speech by three Japanese children.

3. Acquisition of Imperative 'te'

We have collected spontaneous speech from three Japanese children who live in Montreal: N, R and Y. English and French were never collected in either N's speech or Y's speech but were mixed in Y's speech.⁵ We have observed N's speech from 3 years-9 months-3 weeks to 3-10-3, R's speech from 2-0-1 to 2-1-4 and Y's speech from 2-5-4 to 2-7-2. We have attempted to find children about 2 years old because all research on functional projections in early languages has been argued on the basis of children's spontaneous speech at about 2 years old. If our assumption is correct in that 'te' is under Infl and if functional projections are available in early Japanese, we should have 'te' forms in our subjects' spontaneous speech.

3.1 Frequency and Proportion

We have focused on frequency of five grammatical forms from our data. They are sentences, 'te' forms with verbs, imperative 'te' forms, negation with predicates and negation with imperative 'te' forms.

Sentences include both affirmative and negative sentences but one word sentences such as an exclamation and a call. Te' forms with verbs include imperative 'te' forms, aspectual 'te' forms and 'te' forms with non-aspectual verbs (See (1)). We have a complementizer 'te' but this 'te' is excluded. Negation with predicates indicates a form that NEG morpheme *nai* appears with predicates. Negation with imperative 'te' forms is a form that NEG morpheme *nai* appears with imperative 'te' forms. See Table 1 below:

Table 1

	N	R	Y
sentences	417	16	63
'te' forms with verbs	190	16	34
imperative 'te' forms	87	16	27
negation with verbs	42	0	0
negation with imperative 'te' forms	6	0	0

⁵ Y's language environment is not so different from those of N's and R's. Their parents are all Japanese and speak Japanese at home all the time. Y and N went to a different day care service where francophone and anglophone kids were mixed, though R did not.

As you can see in table 1, as a whole, we did not have many negated sentences in our data. Especially, we did not have any negation either in R's speech or Y's speech at all. This is not surprising since we seem to have the same bias crosslinguistically (cf. Harris and Wexler (1996)). On the other hand, recall that negation with imperative 'te' forms play an important role to decide which is the better analysis of 'te' between the functional 'te' hypothesis and the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis. Our data do not provide us with any evidence for our concern about 'te' analysis. However, we did not have any utterances such as in (5) in even N's speech to support the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis. For convenience, we will repeat (5) below:

- (10)(=5) Kore ake-te nai (kudasai).
 this open-te NEG (please)
 '(Please) Don't open this.'

It is difficult to prove non-existence of the relevant forms such as in (10) in our limited data. However, children would never produce sentences such as in (10) though we need to have a longitude observation. Therefore, the functional 'te' hypothesis seems to be more plausible than verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis.

In fact, quite a lot of 'te' forms with verbs could be seen in our data: 45% of sentences for N, 100% of the sentences for R and 54 % of the sentences for Y. Among 'te' forms with verbs, 46% is imperative 'te' forms in N's speech, 100% in R's speech and 79% in Y's speech. We use imperative 'te' forms in a context where we ask somebody to do something for us. Therefore, it is natural for us to have many imperative 'te' forms in children's speech. On the other hand, we use negation with imperative 'te' forms in a context where we ask somebody not to do a certain annoying thing so that we can avoid such a situation. Since children didn't experience such annoying situations so often, it is also natural for us not to have many negation with imperative 'te' forms.

If our assumption that 'te' is under INFL is correct, our result shows that functional projections are available in early Japanese. This is in conflict with Radford's (1990) structure-building hypothesis since early Japanese contain functional categories from the onset. We will closely look at the results of three subjects one by one.

3.2 Individual results

N is going to be 4 in August. R has just turned 2 years old and Y is about 6 months older than R. We have not seen only differences between N's speech and R and Ys' speech but also differences between R's speech and Y's speech.

Let us begin with the youngest subject, R's data. He had not started to speak so much

when we collected his speech. As you see in table 1, the number of sentences is the same as those of 'te' forms with verbs and imperative 'te' forms. It indicates that his relevant sentences are all sentences with imperative 'te' forms. Furthermore, the imperative 'te' forms in R's speech are limited to *akete* ('open (this)'). However, R never misused *akete* ('open (this)'). He used *akete* ('open (this)') when he wanted somebody to open a door or unwrap a candy. What is more interesting is that his first utterance which retains a syntactic structure is a sentence with imperative *te* form. It suggests that early Japanese may contain functional projections from the onset.

In contrast to R's speech, various kinds of forms were included in Y's speech. She used both aspectual 'te' forms and imperative 'te' forms. In addition, Y's imperative 'te' forms are not limited to *akete* ('open (this)'). Some of her sentences are as follows:

(11) (Context: she is taking her doll with her somewhere and talking to the doll.)

Baby, chotto mat-te ne.

Baby, a little wait-te (for me) particle

'Baby, please wait for me.'

(12) Baby ne-te (i)ru.

Baby sleep-te Asp

'Baby (a doll) is sleeping.'

In (11), she correctly use imperative 'te' form to express her request for her doll. In (12), she reported to us that a doll is sleeping. Since her sentences did not include any negation, we did not have any evidence to decide where 'te' is generated. However, as we mentioned in section 3.1, 54% of her sentences are sentences with 'te' form. Again, if our assumption of functional 'te' hypothesis is correct, her data tell us that early Japanese contains functional projections.

Let us look at N's speech. Since she was almost four years old, in contrast to R's and Y's speech, her speech contained various kinds of forms which were not so different from those of adult speech. We are not sure if we can consider her speech when we discuss early Japanese but if we could consider her speech, her speech provided us with interesting perspectives. Her speech contained the Negation with imperative 'te' forms which we were focusing on in this paper.

In her speech, negation with verbs was 10% of the sentences and 14% of the negation with verbs was negation of imperative 'te' forms. As we mentioned in section 3.1, a natural context with imperative 'te' forms is restricted because we should have a situation that a speaker feels uncomfortable about somebody's action and must ask him or her to stop the action. However, whenever we had a situation in question, N correctly used negation with imperative 'te' as follows:

(13) (Her brother threw her toy to a place near N and N shouted at her brother.)

N: Omocha nage-nai-de.
 toy throw-NEG-te.
 'Don't throw the toy.'

In (13), accusative Case *o* is dropped but it can be often seen in adult Japanese. NEG *nai* appeared between a verb, *nager-* 'throw' and *de(te)*. If our assumption of functional 'te' hypothesis is correct, we can explain (13) straightforwardly. Under our assumption, since 'te' is generated under Infl, NEG, *nai* just occurs above the verb, *nager-* below Infl, *de(te)*. In contrast, under the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis, we can not predict (13) since NEG morpheme *nai* can not intervene in a verbal morpheme *nage-te* ('throw-te'). Furthermore, whenever she had situations for negation with imperative 'te' forms such as in (13), she never mixed up a following sentence in her speech, which the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis predicts.

(14) Omocha nage-te-nai.
 toy throw-te-NEG
 'Don't throw the toy.'

Under the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis, since *nage-te* ('throw-te') is a constituent as a verb, NEG *nai* follows *nage-te*. If she assumed *nage-te* as a verbal conjugation, she might have produced sentences such as in (14). However, it is not the case. Thus, as we predicted in section 2, we did not have any utterances in our data to support the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis. In contrast, under the functional 'te' hypothesis, we can correctly predict the position of negator, *nai* in (13) and rule out (14).

In addition, we could see enough *te* form with verbs in N's speech. In contrast to R's speech, imperative 'te' forms were not limited to *akete* ('open (this)'). Therefore, if we could consider N's speech as early Japanese, her data showed us some evidence to support our analysis: 'te' is generated in Infl and functional projections are available in early Japanese from the outset.

In sum, our data supported our assumption, the functional 'te' hypothesis, and showed that early Japanese contained functional projections from the onset. This result conforms to continuity hypothesis, rather than Radford's (1990) structure-building hypothesis. However, we found some problems in our observation. Since our observation was short-term, we did not get enough negated sentences even in N's speech, either. Also, we should have another subject who is older than Y and younger than N somehow. As we have seen above, the amount of speech and variety of grammatical forms are different depending on how old the subjects are. Therefore, we should get another subject or continue to collect spontaneous

speech from R and Y in the long term to make our analysis stronger.

4. Summary

We have mainly argued whether early Japanese contained functional projections in this paper. Our discussion was based on spontaneous speech by three Japanese children.

Assuming that 'te' is generated in Infl in an imperative form, *ake-te* ('open (this)'), we predicted that we should also have 'te' forms in early Japanese if continuity hypothesis is correct. Furthermore, under our analysis, we correctly predicted the position of negator *nai* in sentences with the imperative 'te' form and our data suggested that our analysis of 'te' may be more plausible than the verbal conjugation 'te' hypothesis. Though our data were based on short-term observation, we could conclude that early Japanese contained functional projections from the beginning. Our results suggested that acquisition of Japanese can be also accounted for in terms of continuity hypothesis not maturation hypothesis.

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要 旨

本稿は日本語のテ形を用いた婉曲な命令形を子供がどのように習得するかを考察するための予備研究の結果をまとめたものである。始めに「テ」が日本語において機能範疇である時制に生成されているということを否定の形態の生成場所を基に議論する。また、子供の文法にも機能範疇の投射が存在するのではないかということを議論する。「テ」が機能範疇である時制に生成されているということを仮定し、話し始めた子供たちのデータにこのテ形が見られれば、Radford (1990) が子供の文法には機能範疇がないとした主張の反例となる。モントリオールで3人の子供達の発話を集めた。観察期間は一ヶ月あまりの短いものであったが、結果は本研究の主張に興味深い示唆を与えるものである。