

## English expletives: Narrow syntax and lexical learning

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This paper investigates whether Japanese college students can produce and interpret English expletives *there* and *it*. This investigation is crucial in evaluating the claim that Case-checking and EPP in narrow syntax are indeed not difficult in L2 acquisition, given that Japanese is a pro-drop language, without such overt expletives.

(1) a. There is [<sub>α</sub>a strange man] in the garden.

b. [<sub>α</sub>Misiranu hito]-ga niwa ni iru.

(2) a. It is said [<sub>α</sub>that John is a big liar].

b. [<sub>α</sub>John-wa oousotuki da to] iwareteiru.

We conducted two studies: In one study we analyzed 59 compositions from 30 Japanese study abroad students who took the Institutional Michigan Test of Written English. In the other study we asked 20 native speakers of English (NS) and 16 Japanese EFL learners (TOEIC average 704.7) the acceptability of the sentences with expletive *there* and *it* by employing a magnitude estimation task.

Our findings show that pro-drop-hood does not affect Japanese EFL learners' attainment of overt subjects in narrow syntax and *there*-affixation in LF, but the semantics of *seem/appear* constitutes a great difficulty for them in acquiring the use of nominative *it*. More pertinently, we interpret the results to support that with the help of Universal Grammar, Japanese EFL learners can understand the EPP-driven constraint for the presence of an overt expletive subject in the early stage of acquisition, but they need time to learn that the verb *seem/appear* does not have an external  $\theta$ -role to assign to the subject. This accounts for slow lexical learning.