

EXCLUSIVE CHILDREN IN JAPANESE:  
EVIDENCE FROM DISJUNCTION IN SUBJECT POSITION

**Introduction** Logically, the use of disjunction is felicitous when *at least* one disjunct is true. Adult speakers enrich this meaning to arrive at the exclusive interpretation (*only* one disjunct true).

Tieu et al. (2017) tested Japanese children’s comprehension of disjunction in object position and found that no children enriched the meaning to accept only items where only one disjunct is true.

Shimada (2014) investigated the comprehension of disjunction in negative sentences and found that Japanese children seem to interpret disjunction differently in the object and the subject positions.

Here we present a follow-up experiment to Tieu et al., probing the interpretation of disjunction in the subject position of positive sentences.

Following Bade et al. (2019), we hypothesize that the Nominative Casemarkers *ga* enforces an exhaustive interpretation; with disjunction, this amounts to an exclusive interpretation. We predict that the presence of *ga* will give rise to more exclusive interpretations for children.

**Experiment** 25 monolingual Japanese speaking children (4;8-6;9  $M=5;7$ ) were tested using a Truth-Value Judgment Task in the prediction mode. We modified the experiment in Tieu et al. by putting the disjunctive phrase in subject position. We tested one disjunct true (1DT) and two disjuncts true (2DT) conditions, in addition to control (both disjuncts false) and filler items. For example, (1) can describe either of the two scenarios in (1a) and (1b).

- (1) Niwatori-san ka zou-san-ga hikouki-o oshita.  
 chicken-*Ms.* KA elephant-*Ms.-Nom* airplane-*Acc* pushed  
 ‘Chicken or Elephant pushed the airplane.’
- a. Only chicken pushed the airplane (or only Elephant pushed the airplane) 1DT-condition  
 b. Both chicken and elephant pushed the airplane 2DT-condition

**Procedure** Participants heard a series of stories in which a puppet predicted what might happen next by uttering (1). After watching a video corresponding to either 1DT or 2DT, the participants were asked whether the prediction was correct. 6 children did not complete the task and 2 were excluded because they did not reject the control sentences. We discuss the data from the remaining 17 children below.

**Results** Adopting the classification presented in Table 1, we classified the children into three groups as shown in Table 2. 9 children were classified as exclusive, 4 as inclusive, and 3 as conjunctive. The distribution of participants is represented in Figure 1.

	2DT	1DT
Exclusive children	reject	accept
Inclusive children	accept	accept
Conjunctive children	accept	reject

Table 1: Classifications

	Exclusive	Inclusive	Conjunctive	unclear	Total
Subject position	9	4	3	1	17
Object position (Tieu et al., 2017)	0	3	5	3	11

Table 2: Counts of individual children categorized by interpretation type

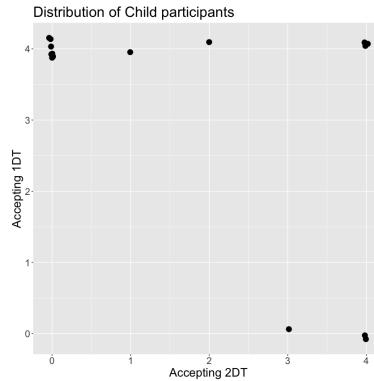


Figure 1: Distribution of Child participants

**Discussion** Our results indicate that some children assign a different interpretation to disjunction in the subject position than the object position. Specifically, 9 out of 17 children interpreted *ka* exclusively in the subject position, like adults, which is something no children did in the object position (Tieu et al.).

Singh et al. (2016) argue that children don't have the exclusive interpretation of disjunction because they lack conjunction as a possible alternative to it. Our results are inconsistent with this proposal, suggesting that at least some children must consider the conjunction as an alternative in order to derive the exclusive interpretation. One way to reconcile these results is to claim that we are dealing with two populations: children who do not have conjunction as an alternative and behave the same in both subject and object position, and children who do have it, and behave as adults.

Ongoing work looks at scrambled objects to sentence-initial position to see whether the source of the different interpretation is the position of disjunction in the sentence or the presence of *ga*.

## References

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