

A Comparative Study of
Occurrence and Non-Occurrence
of Subject
in Japanese and English

from the Perspectives of
Syntax, Discourse Pragmatics and Culture

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First of all...

- *Umare sodatta heya de konnna ni chanto jikan ga sugite watashi dake ga iru nante odorokida.*
- The fact that time continued to pass in the usual way in this apartment where I grew up, even though now I was here all alone, amazed me.
(Banana Yoshimoto, *Kitchen*)

For explaining the same situation, while Japanese does not have subject, English has **subjects**.



Why the Japanese sentence does not have any subject and English sentence has subjects?

In my graduate thesis, this issue is explored from two points of view:

PART1 Syntactic point of view

PART2 Pragmatic point of view

Data

- The written data
 - Two Japanese novels and their translations
 - Soseki Natsume, *Botchan*
 - Banana Yoshimoto, *Kitchen*
 - The spoken data
 - Narrative of Mister O Corpus



PART1 Syntactic Study

Previous Studies

□ Do-language and Become-language

<English>

He was surprised.

Something surprised him.

<Japanese>

Kare wa odorokasareta.

Kare wa nanika ni yotte odorokasareta.

The notion of the agent is

Japanese < English

□ Topic-Comment VS Subject-Verb

<Japanese>

Zou wa hana ga nagai.

<English>

Elephants (topic), noses are long.

Li and Thompson (1976)

Analysis

- <Japanese narratives>
- *Soko kara kou ochisou ni narimashite, ma hijyo ni kiken na jyotai ni naru n desu keredo mo*
(J03 Nar.1.1 011 underlines added)
- “He was nearly falling down from there, so the situation became very dangerous.”
(Translated by the author)

□ <English narratives>

□ And once he gets to the other side he realizes he makes it, so you see happiness on his face. And then, **it** ends with him being just excited. **That's** a good smile.

(E03 Nar.1 018-020 underlines added)



PART2 Pragmatics Study

Previous Studies

□ (1) Discourse tendency

	Japanese	English
The reference of representing a new character	Noun phrase (e.g. Shirokun)	Noun phrase (e.g. Mochi)
The reference of representing a character as an old information	Non-occurrence of subject	Pronoun (e.g. he, she, it)
Time to establish a character as an old information	longer	shorter

Clancy (1980)



- (2) Perceptual difference

- Japanese: the perspective of “an insect”

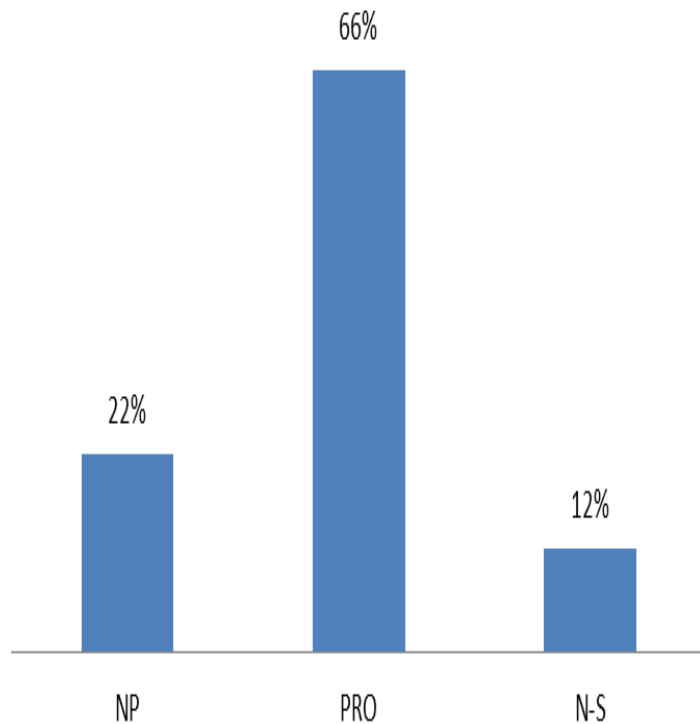
- English: the perspective of “God”

- Kanaya (2004)

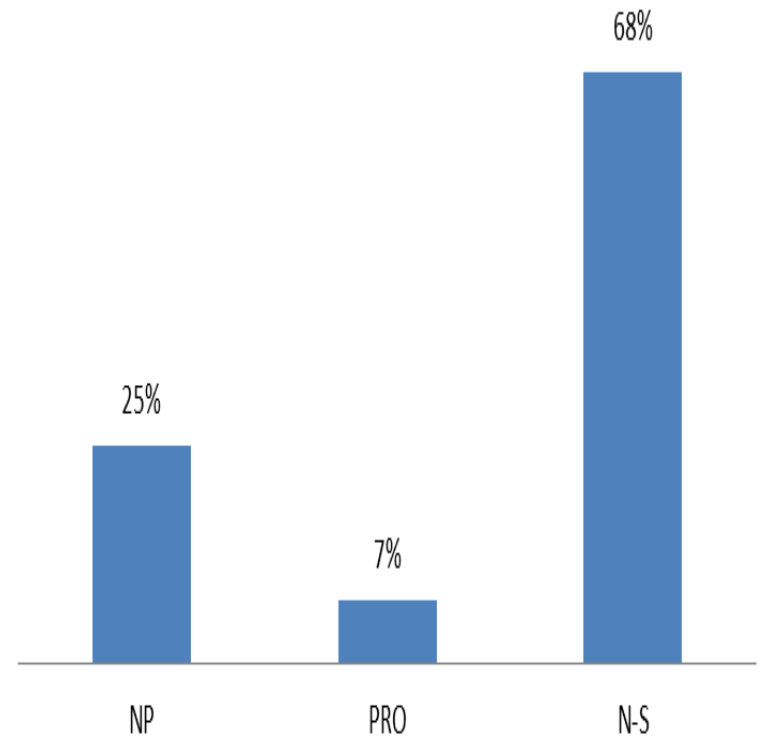
Result

□ Discourse tendency

The percentage of referential choice in English narratives



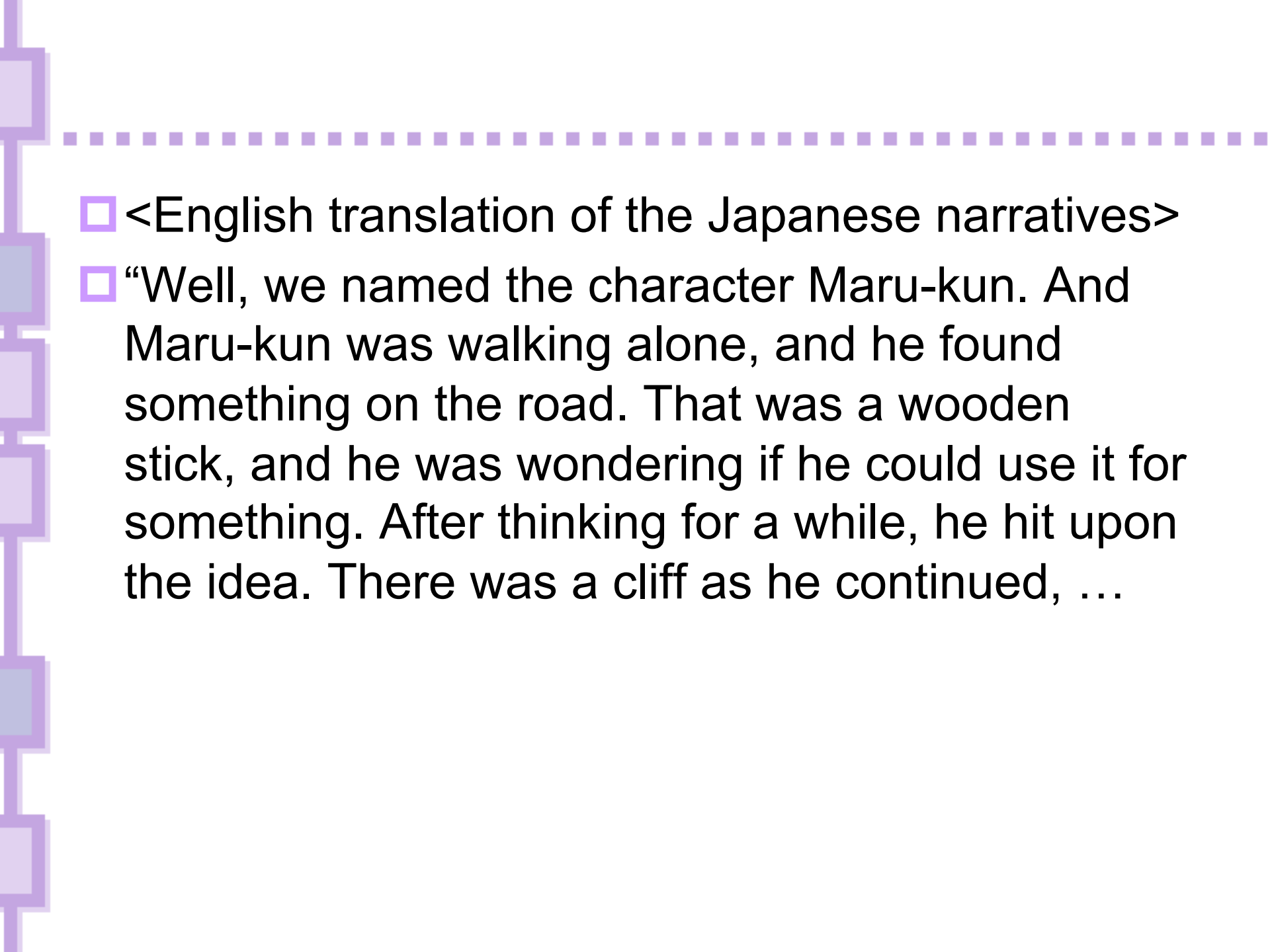
The percentage of referential choice in Japanese narratives



□ <Japanese narratives>

□ *Etto sono **Maru kun** ga hi, hitoride, chotto, aruiteitandesu keredomo, de, sorede, ___ michi de, etto, nanika wo mitsuketandesuyo. De, sore ga ki no bou de, sore, nanika ni tsukaenai kanaa tte, **sono, character** wa omoimashite, de, sorede, de ___ chotto nayande, ___ hirameite, de, sono, hirameitatte iu koto ga etto desune, chotto, gake ga arundesuyo, ___ mou chotto iku to, sono michi no saki niwa de,....*

□ (Mister O Corpus, J09 Nar.2 002-0011)

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- <English translation of the Japanese narratives>
 - “Well, we named the character Maru-kun. And Maru-kun was walking alone, and he found something on the road. That was a wooden stick, and he was wondering if he could use it for something. After thinking for a while, he hit upon the idea. There was a cliff as he continued, ...

□ <English narratives>

□ So there's **a little white ball guy** walking along, and **he** comes to a cliff. Un, **he's** trying to think of how to get across. So **he** goes back and he finds a small little grey guy, and **they** decide to go across together with the little grey guy on top of the white guy's head. But whenever **he** jumps, **the white guy** does a back-flip, and lands on the little grey guy, squishing him.

□ (E02 Nar.1 001-004 underlines added)

□ Perspectives

□ <Japanese narratives>

□ ...*toriaezu Shiro kun no hou ga karada ga okkii node, Haiiro kun jibun no ue ni noreyo, te iu koto de, Haiiro kun wo jibun no ue ni nose mashita.*

□ (J06 Nar.1 005 underlines added)

□ <English narratives>

□ And **he** said, 'Why don't **you** ride on my head?'
So **they** tried to jump, but **it** wasn't strong enough, or...whatever.

□ (E02 Nar.02 004-005)

Conclusion

- Japanese does not necessarily request subject.
- English needs subject.

- From **syntactic point of view**, we have seen...
 - Do-language and Become-language
 - Subject prominent language and Topic prominent language

- From **pragmatics point of view**, we have seen...
 - Discourse tendency
 - Perceptual difference

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