

## Early acquisition of the focus expression *sika-nai* ‘nothing but’ in Japanese: Absence of sentential-scope interpretations and non-association of *sika* with topic phrases

**Introduction:** This paper reports the results of our experiment which show children’s early acquisition of the position of the focus expression *sika-nai* ‘nothing but/only’ in Japanese. It has been proposed that *sika-nai* is positioned in NegP at LF (Tanaka 1997). If Japanese children have the knowledge that *sika-nai* is in NegP early, we have predicted that children do not extend its focus domain to TP or CP, higher than NegP.

Our results show that children do not extend its focus domain to TP and CP and they do not associate *sika* with the whole sentence or the topic phrase. These results suggest that Japanese children have acquired that *sika-nai* is in NegP early.

**Backgrounds:** According to Tanaka (1997: 146), *sika-nai* corresponds to ‘nobody except’ or ‘nothing but.’ The focus particle *sika* is attached to a focus phrase, and the negation *nai* is attached to a predicate. *Sika*, taken together with *nai* ‘not,’ means ‘only.’ *Sika* and *nai* are often used separately, such as *Taroo-ga LGB-sika yonde-nai* ‘Taroo has read only LGB.’

*Nai* ‘not’ in *sika-nai* attaches only to the left of the tense marker ((1)), whereas another focus particle *dake* ‘only’ can be attached to the right of the tense marker ((2)). This difference is explained by the position of *sika-nai*: according to Tanaka (1997), *nai* is in the head of NegP and the *sika*-phrase moves to NegP specifier at LF ((3)). In contrast, according to Kishimoto (2009), *dake* ‘only’ extends its focus domain over TP in adult Japanese. *Dake* can take the whole sentence as its scope and (1) can have a S-scope interpretation such as ‘Only the event that John read the book happened and nothing else happened.’

Notley et al. (2009: 269) has proposed that children acquiring English initially analyze ‘only’ as having S-scope as [<sub>IP</sub> Only [<sub>IP</sub> John [<sub>I'</sub> [<sub>VP</sub> ran the marathon.]]]] Several studies (Endo 2004, Sano 2012, 2015, etc.) examined the acquisition of *dake* ‘only’ in Japanese and have shown that children also give VP scope or S-scope interpretations with *dake*.

**Predictions:** In our experiment, we have first examined whether Japanese children extend the focus domain of *sika-nai* over TP and give S-scope interpretations. Furthermore, we have examined whether children extend the focus domain of *sika-nai* over CP and associate the focus particle *sika* with the topic phrases. If children have knowledge that *sika-nai* is positioned in NegP, which is lower than TP and CP, we have predicted that children do not extend the focus domain of *sika-nai* either to TP or CP.

**Experiments&Results:** The subjects were 15 Japanese children from 4;8 to 6;6 and 13 adults. The children were tested individually in a day-care center in Tokyo by the Truth Value Judgment Task. An experimenter told a story to the child with a picture, which showed 2 animals buying vegetables or sweets. The puppet gave the description of the picture, i.e. the test sentence, and the child was asked to judge whether the puppet was right or wrong.

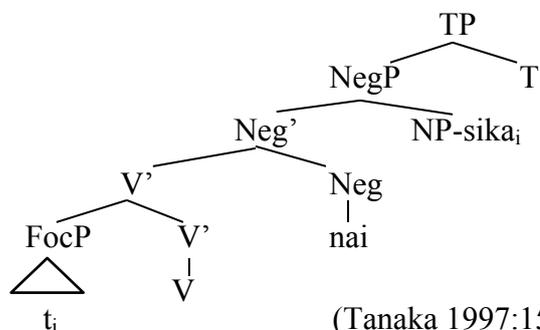
Two sentences examining the S-scope interpretations and one sentence examining the association with the topic phrase were included (e.g. (4)&(6)). In (4), *sika* is attached to the chick and only the chick bought the chocolate, thus the test sentence is true. However, if a child associates *sika* to the whole sentence and give a S-scope interpretation such as ‘the only event happened is the chick buying a chocolate,’ the child may judge the sentence as false because another event, the squirrel buying a candy, is included. In addition, the child may give false responses because of the Grice’s conversational maxim of quantity (Sano (2015)). We included one more test sentence without *sika-nai* ((5)) to exclude false responses due to the maxim. In (6) with the topic phrase, *sika* is attached to the frog and the test sentence is true. However, if the child associates *sika* with the topic phrase, the onion, the child may judge the sentence as false because the frog bought an onion and a tomato.

The results show that the children gave S-scope interpretations 0% of the time (0/28) (Table 1), unlike *dake* ‘only’ (41.6% (10/24)) tested in Sano (2015). Thus, the children knew that the focus domain of *sika* was not extended to TP and did not associate *sika* with the whole sentence. Furthermore, the children knew that the focus domain of *sika* was not extended to CP and did not associate *sika* to the topic phrase 93.3% of the time (Table 2). Therefore, we conclude that children have the knowledge that *sika-nai* is in NegP early.

<Appendix>

- (1) John-ga hon-o yon-da-dake (da).  
 John-Nom book-Acc read-Past-only Copula  
 ‘It is only the case that John read books.’ (Kishimoto 2009: 470)
- (2) John-ga Mary-sika sikar-ana-katta.  
 John-Nom Mary-Foc scold-not-Past  
 ‘John scolded only Mary.’ (Takahashi 1990: 129)

(3)



(Tanaka 1997:153)

- (4) Story: A baby chick and a squirrel went shopping. The baby chick bought a chocolate, and the squirrel bought a candy.  
 Test sentence (S-scope): Hiyokosan-sika chocolate-o kawa-nak-atta yo.  
 Chick-Foc chocolate-Acc buy-Neg-Past Prt.  
 ‘Only the chick bought a chocolate.’
- (5) Story: A cat and a rabbit went shopping. The cat bought a persimmon and the rabbit bought a strawberry.  
 Test sentence (Grice’s maxim): Nekosan-ga kaki-o kat-ta yo.  
 Cat-Nom persimmon-Acc buy-Past Prt  
 ‘The cat bought a persimmon.’
- (6) Story: A frog and a squirrel went shopping. The frog bought an onion and a tomato, and the squirrel bought two tomatoes.  
 Test sentence (Topicalization): Tamanegi-wa kaerusan-sika kawa-nak-atta yo.  
 onion-Top frog-Foc bought-Neg-Past Prt  
 ‘(As for) the onion, only the frog bought.’

**(7) Table 1: Results of children’s S-scope interpretations**

	Percentages of S-scope interpretations
4-year-olds (N=4)	0% (0/6)
5-year-olds (N=5)	0% (0/10)
6-year-olds (N=6)	0% (0/12)
Total	0% (0/28)
Adults (N=13)	0% (0/26)

**(8) Table 2: Results of the non-association of *sika* with topic phrases**

	Percentages of non-association of <i>sika</i> with topic phrases
4-year-olds (N=4)	75.0% (3/4)
5-year-olds (N=5)	100% (5/5)
6-year-olds (N=6)	100% (6/6)
Total	93.3% (14/15)
Adults (N=13)	100% (13/13)

**Selected References:** Endo, M. (2004) “Developmental Issues on the Interpretation of Focus Particles by Japanese Children.” In *BUCLD28*, 141-152. Kishimoto, H. (2009) “Topic Prominency in Japanese.” *The Linguistic Review* 26, 465-513. Notley, A. et al. (2009) “Children’s Interpretation of Focus Expressions in English and Mandarin.” *Language Acquisition* 16, 240-282. Sano, T. (2012) “Abstract CP/IP Configuration in Child Japanese.” In *BUCLD38*, 525-535. Sano, T. (2015) “Another Argument for the Sentential Scope Analysis of a focus Marker in Child Languages.” In Ehara, H., et al. (eds.), *Untriring Pursuit of Better Alternatives*, Kaitakusha. Tanaka, H.(1997) “Invisible Movement in *Sika-nai* and the Linear Crossing Constraint.” *Journal of East Asian Linguistics* 6, 143-188.