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Full Paper

A Cognitive Approach to Teaching English Dative Constructions to Japanese University Students with Low English Proficiency

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to consider practical applications of the Cognitive Linguistics-inspired (CLI) method in the context of teaching dative alternation to Japanese university students with low English proficiency. Dative alternation involves two structures: double-object constructions (DOC) and prepositional object constructions (POC). In particular, Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners have trouble remembering which preposition (i.e. *to* or *for*) to use in POCs, because *to*-POC and *for*-POC are similar in form, which therefore causes significant confusion and difficulty. Although a previous study showed that incorporating a method based on Cognitive Linguistics into an EFL setting could be useful in enhancing learners' comprehension of the dative alternation to some extent, it is hardly likely that this method can be directly applicable to low-proficiency students who often forget even basic grammar rules and therefore lack motivation to learn advanced grammar. Therefore, to engage their attention, the method needs to be tailored appropriately for them: in this study, the semantics of the most prototypical verbs which appear in *to*-POC and *for*-POC (i.e. *give* and *make* respectively) was introduced with visual stimuli in the framework of a CLI approach. A pre-test-post-test quasi-experimental design was employed with the experimental and control group to study low-proficiency Japanese EFL learners. The participants in the experimental group were exposed to the CLI method while those in the control group were taught using the so-called conventional and traditional methods. The results obtained from the experiment revealed that the newly-proposed CLI method could significantly help them develop grammatical comprehension of dative constructions.

Keywords: Cognitive Linguistics, grammar instruction, dative constructions, low-proficiency EFL learners

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1. Introduction

In the era of globalization, as English has expanded its reach as an international language, a dramatic change has gradually but steadily been underway in Japan's educational system, in order to respond to this trend. Greater importance has been put on a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning to encourage the growth of independent thinking and the expression of personal opinions. For the purpose of enhancing their English communication skills, English as a foreign language (EFL) learners should tackle the challenges of learning English and develop various abilities such as speaking, writing, and using vocabulary correctly; however, most of them do not seem to place a high value on grammar as part of their English training. Actually, teaching grammar in Japan has long been regarded as being equivalent to teaching via the traditional grammar translation method, in which memorizing a surprisingly large set of grammatical rules for correct usage is an essential feature and in which the student takes a passive role in the learning process. This sort of method is hardly to be associated with the facilitation of Japanese EFL learners' communicative competencies, leading to higher levels of boredom, frustration, and lack of motivation in classrooms. Above all, this tendency is particularly evident among students who, when they enter university, are exposed to longer formal instruction periods than they have been used to in their English classes. More specifically, as a low-proficiency level is generally attributable to poor achievement, low-proficiency students, by that very fact, gain little sense of achievement, which can easily and severely limit their motivation to seize the opportunity to start learning English grammar again. This vicious cycle needs to be broken because 'grammar' *per se* should not be opposed to 'communication.' Grammar, which forms the backbone of any language, should be singled out as one of the most essential factors in English teaching and learning. Without grammar knowledge, we would have a great deal of trouble conveying how we think and feel in any form; therefore, it seems urgent that instructors should treat grammar as intriguing and useful, and make it clear that better 'grammar' contributes to better 'communication.' In other words, an effective way to pique student interest and curiosity in language needs to be developed, one that is aimed at learners who have been obliged to remember surface structures by rote learning; hopefully this will lead to the improvement of comprehension and awareness and become part of more effective pedagogical technique.

This study focuses on dative alternation, which is heavily used in English. Dative alternation embodies two syntactic structures, double-object constructions (DOC), such as *John gave Mary a book* or *John made Mary a cookie,* and prepositional object constructions (POC), such as *John gave a book to Mary* or *John made a cookie for Mary*. POCs are mainly concerned with the prepositions *to* and *for*. Strictly speaking, *to*-alternation is not the same as *for*-alternation, which is also called called 'benefactive alternation.' The most demanding to learn aspects of dative alternation are that DOCs and POCs can not always be paraphrased in terms of each other and that these three syntactic structures (i.e. DOCs, *to*-dative constructions, and *for*-dative constructions) have their own distinctive meanings. However, before being able to understand the deeper and more complicated aspects, many Japanese low-proficiency EFL learners first find it highly challenging to select the appropriate preposition in POCs. The reason is that under a conventional and traditional instruction learners are taught mostly to memorize and learn each structure through paraphrasing exercises: DOCs are paraphrased into POCs and *vice versa*. The rules for which the verb takes *to* or *for* seem totally unsystematic and random to them because their knowledge is based mostly on mere rote memorization. Traditional grammar teaching does not provide a systematic view of dative alternation: this thus takes its toll on students, entrenching false understanding, and making it much harder to apply the series of uninformed examples they have struggled to memorize over a long period of time correctly to new situations. Therefore, the present study was intended to shed light on and explore how to effectively teach dative constructions to Japanese EFL learners with low-proficiency, and investigate the effectiveness of the CLI method in enhancing their performance using a pre-test-post-test quasi-experimental design.

2. How to Teach Dative Alternation to Low-Proficiency EFL Students

The insights and theories of Cognitive Linguistics, a relatively new branch of linguistics which emerged in the early 1970s through the efforts of linguists who tried to capture the relationship between language and mind, have been expanded powerfully in recent decades on the presupposition that all lin-

guistic phenomenon are meaningful, as exemplified by the latest theories of prototype, categorization, metaphor and so on.[1-3] Based on the belief that language lies at the heart of what makes us human, and is not separate from other human activities, this paradigm has considered language to be closely related to human cognition.

Applying the framework of Cognitive Linguistics in second-language (L2) settings has recently gained attention in the field of the applied linguistics as a means of helping EFL learners acquire their target language. Recent research has studied the potential benefits of Cognitive Linguistics-inspired (CLI) approach in grammar learning.[4,5] In the case of dative alternation, Takahashi (2012)[6] utilized an original test for selecting prepositions in POCs in a pre-test-post-test design and concluded that incorporating the cognitive approach into English instruction for Japanese university students could expand their understanding of this grammatical point. The method proposes that *to*-dative constructions and *for*-dative constructions have their own distinct meanings, leading to their own respective dative constructions. She asserts that the numbers of arguments required by a verb can determine whether to use *to* or *for* in POCs.[6,7] To explain this one defines the linguistic term "argument" as a syntactic element in a sentence that serves to complete the meaning of the verb. In the case of *to*-dative verbs such as *give*, phrases like *John gave*, *John gave Mary* and *John gave a book* are all considered incomplete, while the phrase *John gave Mary a book* is considered complete. As this example shows, this verb requires three arguments: AGENT (*John*), THEME (*a book*), and RECIPIENT (*Mary*). We can say that these verbs are three-place predicates. On the other hand, for *for*-dative verbs such as *make*, phrases like *John made a cookie* and *John made Mary a cookie* are both considered complete. The RECIPIENT (*Mary*) is optional, so these verbs are called two-place predicates.

Following this line of research, this author previously showed[8] via an empirical study involving the administration of pre-, post-, and delayed post-tests that the CLI method, which focuses on the form/meaning of a construction,[9] also had a significant impact on Japanese EFL university students' retention of correct forms in long-term memory. It is widely recognized that the input to which learners are exposed is essential in L2 learning[10,11] as well as in first language (L1) acquisition.[12] In light of the CLI approach, at the early stage of language acquisition, children recognize various items used conventionally through extended exposure to actual language usage and then acquire the abstract patterns which can be used to generate new utterances by themselves. This approach also presents an hypothesis, called the Verb Island Hypothesis, that children's early performance can be characterized through an inventory of verb-island syntactic structures. Figure 1,[13-14] below, provides a detailed picture of how a pattern of DOCs is acquired. High frequency usage of a given verb (e.g. *give*, *throw*, or *kick*) can promote the entrenchment of its syntactic pattern (e.g. [NP-*give*-NP-NP], [NP-*throw*-NP-NP], [NP-*kick*-NP-NP], respectively) in children's minds. Finally, an abstract pattern of [NP-Verb-NP-NP] becomes firmly entrenched, preparing them for new utterances with a particular item fitting into each empty slot. Thus, input frequency is of significant importance in L1 acquisition. Likewise, in the case of L2 settings, we are generally likely to perceive and acquire frequent, prototypical, or salient examples more easily than rare,

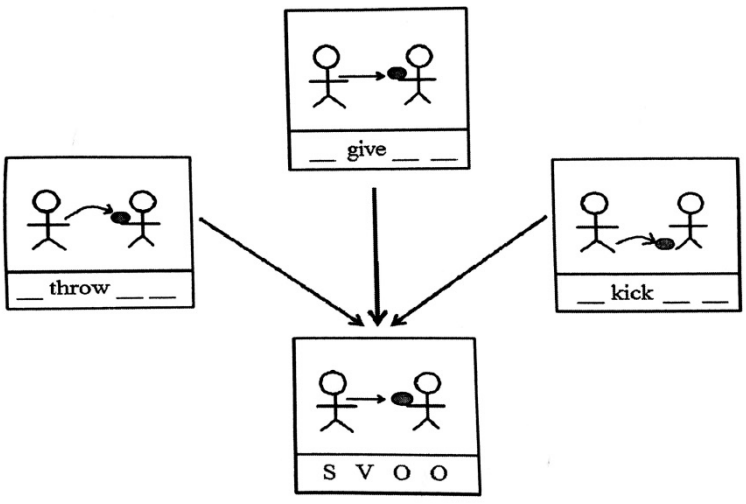


Figure 1: The process of entrenchment for DOCs adapted from Kodama & Nojima (2009).[13]

atypical, or unnoticeable ones (e.g. *give* vs. *allocate* in DOCs). Therefore, given that *give* and *make* are the most prototypical verbs in the *give*- and *make*-type categories, respectively, and can serve as the most effective models for students to learn these syntactic structures, we were led to propose that for dative constructions, teaching the semantics of these particular verbs would be the most appropriate ones for students to get a picture of dative alternation. The teacher's explanation of these forms also included notice of the fact that *give*-type verbs are motivated by the concept of 'transfer' and *make*-type verbs are motivated by the concept of 'emergence.'[15] However, in the above-mentioned study, this approach was only significantly helpful to Japanese university students with an intermediate or above level of English; being equipped with better basic grammar knowledge and achievement, they had enough intellectual curiosity to enjoy more advanced theory than to which they had been exposed in high school.

In contrast, it is extremely questionable whether this approach can be directly applied to low-proficiency learners. In most cases, they are reluctant to learn English because they have strong and lasting negative impressions of English grammar learning. In fact, preliminary investigations suggest that the CLI method proposed by previous researchers seems to have had no positive effect on Japanese low-proficiency EFL learners' performance for dative constructions.[15] As mentioned above, the semantics of the most prototypical inputs can be effective in entrenching a given structure in memory so it can be retained over time, but the problem is how this approach should be tailored appropriately for university students with low-proficiency. That is, a new, refreshing, and consciousness-raising method should be devised for them, after deliberate consideration not only of their level of ability but also their level of interest.

One possible answer is that instructors explain phrases using as many easy words as possible and especially by using visual images of the verb as a means of gaining students' attention and interest.[16] Visual aids have been proven to have a positive impact on language learning in that they can help learners not only enhance their comprehension but raise their motivation and awareness.[17] This fact is considered in cognitive linguistics to be most likely related to notions involved with Dual coding theory.[18] This theory of cognition asserts that cognition is formed by two distinct but connected symbolic systems: a verbal code for language and a non-verbal code for mental imagery. Two different types of coding can act more effectively in promoting language learning. That being the case, combining pictures and texts together in EFL contexts is expected to increase students' motivation and their involvement in classroom activities, leading to a better understanding of English.

3. Methodology

3.1 The Purpose of this Study

This study aims to find out whether Japanese EFL university students with low English proficiency can enhance their understanding of dative alternation through the CLI method, specifically in the process of selecting appropriate prepositions in POCs. This method focuses on the semantics of the most prototypical verbs that appear in *to*-POCs and *for*-POCs, respectively. The participants were identified as low-level learners and then assigned into two groups, or one control and one experimental: the experimental group received CLI instruction while the control group was taught using the conventional method. The design of the study was quasi-experimental, which is a pre-test-post-test design. All statistical analysis was performed using R 3.1.0 for Windows.

3.2 Testing Instrument and Preliminary Investigation

A test from Takahashi (2012),[6] was adapted for the selection of appropriate prepositions in POCs. Our goal for the final test was to include ten items from each of the two verb categories (i.e. *give*- and *make*-type from Green (1974)[19] and Pinker (1989)[20]), leading to a total of 20 fill-in-the-blank questions. For the purpose of selecting which verbs to be used and checking the time to be allotted for testing, a preliminary investigation was conducted with 32 Japanese EFL university students as participants, none of whom were part of the main research (as discussed in **section 3.3** et seq.). As part of the preliminary investigation, their English proficiency levels were measured through Oxford Quick Placement Test, or OQPT.[21] OQPT is a 30-minute multiple choice language test, whose results are mapped on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels basic A1 through advanced C2 (i.e. A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2). This framework is widely adopted as a guideline for describing achievement in learners of foreign languages. Considering that the participants were evaluated as being in the CEFR A2 to lower B1

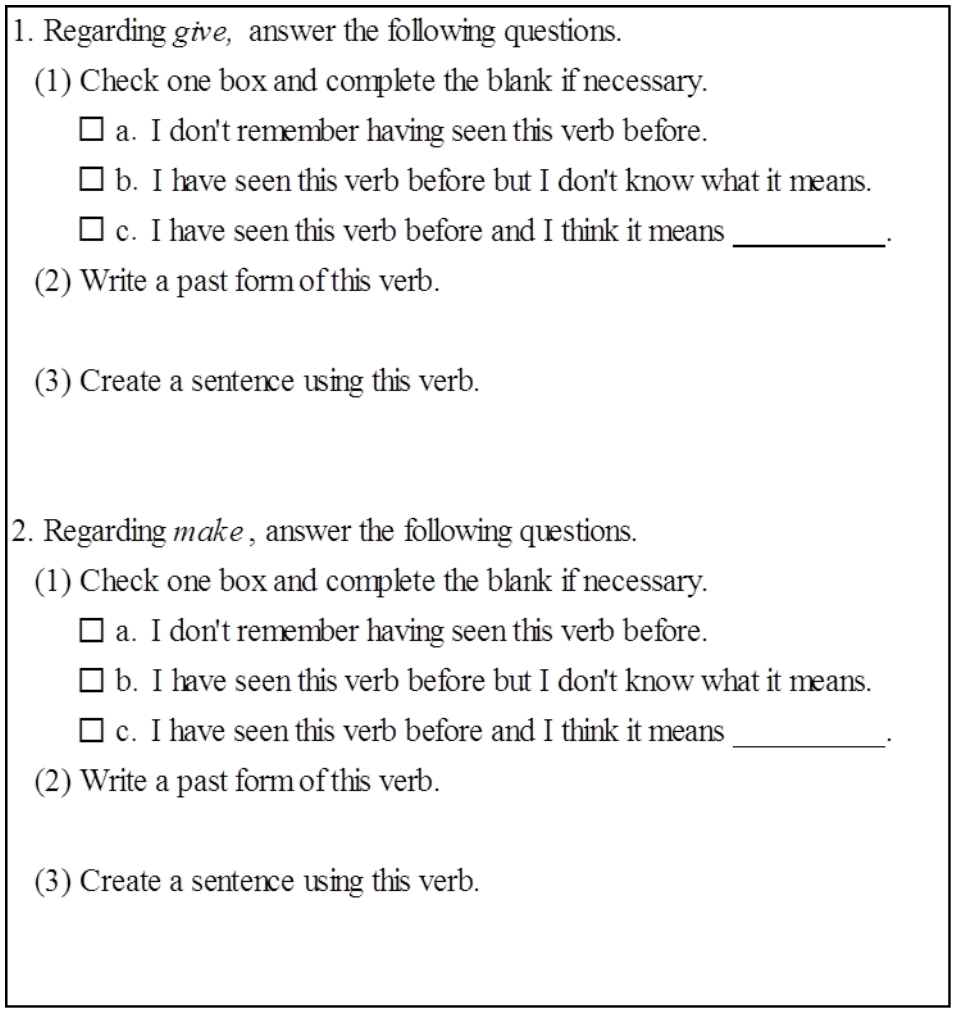
Table 1: A list of give-type / make-type verbs in a vocabulary knowledge test. (Underlined verbs are actually used in a test for selection of appropriate prepositions.)

give-type verbs	*give, hand, lend, sell, pass, offer, promise, tell, show, read, teach, mail, send, forward, kick, throw, bring, take, e-mail, fax*
make- type verbs	*make, cook, boil, roast, sew, knit, draw, bake, buy, find, get, build, gather, sing, recite, play, call, earn, gain, win*

range, they were considered to be at the low end of English proficiency.

In order to understand syntactic structures concerning dative alternation, it is of great importance to understand the meaning of the verb that appears in the structure. If learners have trouble identifying the meaning of a verb, it is almost impossible for them to understand the meaning of the entire structure. Therefore, the preliminary test was structured as a verb knowledge test to determine which verbs' meanings students had already acquired. Bearing in mind that the verbs were to be selected so as to be highly familiar to Japanese university students, 20 appropriate verbs were each chosen from the *give*- and *make*-type categories as shown in Table 1, above.

Based on the idea of a vocabulary scale put forth by Wesche and Paribakht (1996),[22] this preliminary test aimed at measuring the depth of vocabulary knowledge for each verb. Figure 2, below, presents two examples (*give* and *make*) of the questions used (the full test is not included in this report due to space limitations. Also, the original version of the test was stated in Japanese). Each question was worth 5 points, and the test took 30 minutes to complete. Scoring for each question was as follows: in part (1), students received no points if they opted for answer (1a), 1 point for (1b), and 2 points for (1c). They


1. Regarding *give*, answer the following questions.

(1) Check one box and complete the blank if necessary.

☐ a. I don't remember having seen this verb before.

☐ b. I have seen this verb before but I don't know what it means.

☐ c. I have seen this verb before and I think it means _____.

(2) Write a past form of this verb.

(3) Create a sentence using this verb.

2. Regarding *make*, answer the following questions.

(1) Check one box and complete the blank if necessary.

☐ a. I don't remember having seen this verb before.

☐ b. I have seen this verb before but I don't know what it means.

☐ c. I have seen this verb before and I think it means _____.

(2) Write a past form of this verb.

(3) Create a sentence using this verb.

Figure 2. Sample questions used in the vocabulary knowledge test (with verbs from Green (1974)[19] and Pinker (1989)[20]).

Table 2: A summary of the participants in the two groups

	Experimental Group (n = 30)	Control Group (n = 30)	
gender	male 11; female 19	male 13; female 17	
average age	19.8	20.4	
CEFR level	A2, B1	A2, B1	
OQPT M (SD)	25.50 (4.35)	24.40 (3.79)	p = .31*ns*

Note . M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, *ns* = not significant

scored 1 point if they could write the correct past form of each verb in (2), and 2 points if they could write a sentence using the verb. Part (2) was incorporated into this test because the example sentences in the test for appropriate prepositions were to be in the past tense. In scoring (3), minor spelling mistakes wherein the intended meaning was clear did not lead to a deduction in points. The 10 highest-scoring verbs for each verb type were then used as the 20 items in the final test on appropriate prepositions in POCs. The chosen verbs are underlined in Table 1 on the previous page.

After two months, a test asking the students to fill in the appropriate preposition in POCs (see Appendix) was administered during regular class time so as to determine the length of time needed to complete the test. About 80 percent of the participants (25 out of 32) said that 5 minutes was a reasonable time to complete the test. This test was to serve as the pre- and post-test for the main research as a means of measuring the level of the students' understanding of dative constructions in English.

3.3 Participants in Main Study

A total of 60 Japanese university students from a private university in the Kansai region participated in the main study in June, 2015. At the time of the experiment, all of the participants belonged to two classes, each receiving the same English lesson taught by the author. Prior to the main research, the students were explained that: (1) the purpose of this study was to improve future grammar instruction, (2) non-participation would not affect any grades given in the class, and (3) their personal information would be kept confidential. Under these terms, no students declined to participate.

As stated above, the purpose of this study was to see whether our newly-proposed CLI method is effective in teaching dative alternation to Japanese low-proficiency EFL learners. At the beginning of the research, the participants were administered the OQPT in order to determine the level of proficiency and homogeneity of the group. Only 12 students' scores were at the equivalent of the CEFR B1 level, and the rest were at the CEFR A2 level, which means that they were all at the lower end of proficiency, as in preliminary investigation. The result of an independent samples t-test revealed that there was no significant difference between the two classes (t (58) = 1.03, p = .31, r = .14), forming two homogeneous groups of EFL learners. Table 2, above, gives a summary of the participants in the two groups.

In addition, to further understand the participants, a questionnaire designed to identify their level of awareness of English grammar was distributed. The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale with rankings from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree," and contained 3 statements which they were to rank about their attitudes towards English grammar: (i) I am **eager** to study English grammar; (ii) I am **interested in** English grammar; and (iii) I **need** to study English grammar. The questionnaire also included a comment section in which the students were told to feel free to write anything about how they felt about English grammar. Table 3, on the next page, shows the results of a nonparametric Mann-Whitney U-test conducted on the results of the 3-item test.

This showed no significant differences between the two groups on any of the questions: (i) eagerness (U = 449.00, p = .99, r = .21), (ii) interest (U = 395.50, p = .40, r = .11), and (iii) necessity (U = 377.50, p = .15, r = .15). Judging from the mean scores, the participants tended to feel the need to learn English grammar while they did not have a feeling of strong eagerness and interest. They varied in their responses in the comment section, with the vast majority offering negative opinions such as English grammar is "boring," "troublesome," or "frustrating." The relationship between their level of awareness and proficiency is likely to be a source of further insight, and this topic has been reserved for future investigation. Thus,

Table 3: Results from the level of awareness test of the two groups, for each questionnaire item.

	item	group	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*U*	*p*
(i)	eagerness	Experimental	30	2.13	0.97	449.00	0.99*ns*
		Control	30	2.11	0.88		
(ii)	interest	Experimental	30	1.97	0.76	397.50	0.40*ns*
		Control	30	2.10	0.71		
(iii)	necessity	Experimental	30	2.97	0.93	377.50	0.15*ns*
		Control	30	3.20	0.85		

Note . *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, *ns* = not significant

the participants on the whole had low eagerness and interest in English grammar, as well as low-end English proficiency.

3.4 Procedure

The study was conducted in the following order: the OQPT, the 3-item language attitude questionnaire, the pre-test, the questionnaire related to the pre-test, and the post-test. After taking OQPT and the questionnaire to elucidate what the sample population in this study was like, the pre-test was administered to both classes to measure their understanding of dative constructions. During five-minute pre-test, none of the participants were allowed to use a dictionary, with instructions emphasizing they were to leave the space blank if they had no idea of the answer. They were subsequently requested to fill out a questionnaire regarding their views of the test itself, shown in Figure 3, below; the questionnaire consisted of two parts: (1) one closed-ended question and (2) one open-ended question.

Upon completing the questionnaire, they were asked to exchange their pre-test papers with another student and to score the points for each question. The maximum possible score was 20. Afterward, the two classes engaged in different activities: the CLI method was presented to the experimental group and the traditional method to the control group. Time for both forms of instruction (performed by the same instructor) was set to between 30 and 40 minutes.

In the control group class, which mainly focused on doing a paraphrasing exercise, students were instructed to memorize which verb takes '*to*' or '*for*'; they were instructed to verify the meaning of each verb by referring to a dictionary and write down as many sentences as possible using the syntactic structure [SVO *to*/*for* O]. Meanwhile, the instructor monitored students' active participation in the activity; she asked students with questions to raise their hands, and when necessary answered questions in random order. By contrast, the experimental group was given instruction with an emphasis on the semantics of *give* and *make*, respectively. First, they were instructed to look up the meaning of *give* in a dictionary and create a Japanese sentence with this meaning so as to encourage them to imagine the semantics of the verb. Most of the sentences they produced included some kind of double object structure such as *watashi-wa tomodachi-ni ame-wo age-ta* "I gave my friend a candy" and *haha-wa inu-ni esa-wo age-ta* "My mother gave the dog food," which means that the students understood the involvement of the

(1) Do you remember learning this grammar rules? And how much do you think you did well on the test?
Check one box.

☐ a. I do not remember learning these grammar rules.

☐ b. I remember learning these grammar rules, but I did not do well on the test.

☐ c. I remember learning these grammar rules, and I did well on the test.

(2) How do you remember the grammar rules used in this test?

Figure 3. A questionnaire evaluating student's knowledge and understanding of dative constructions.

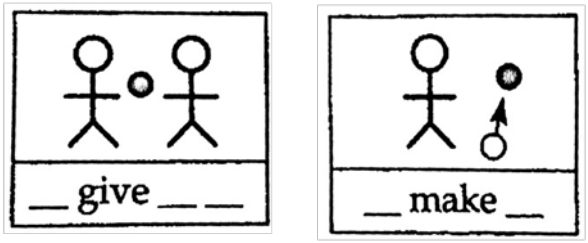


Figure 4. The depictions of "give" and "make" cited in Tomasello (1999)[23] and used in our study.

RECIPIENT in the case of the verb *give* on an unconscious level. Figure 4,[23] above, shows images depicting the act of giving and making. These images were used at this stage to demonstrate that with regards to *make*, a RECIPIENT is not included in the act of making. It was emphasized that for dative constructions whether the verb required a RECIPIENT or not determines the appropriate preposition. In the next step, the students were asked to sort out all the verbs used in the pre-test based on the semantics of *give* and *make* respectively, and finally a list of *give*-type verbs and *make*-type verbs was completed through discussion. To further enhance their understanding, a more detailed explanation was given: *give*-type verbs such as *send* and *show* were stated to entail the *transfer* of a THING, while *make*-type verbs such as *buy* and *sing* were stated to entail the *emergence* of a THING. Taking *make* as an example, it was demonstrated how a THING (e.g. *a cake* or *a doll*) emerges out of the event, which was explained as different from *give*-type verbs which concern already-existing THINGS, except for certain verbs regarding communication (e.g. *read*, *tell*).[20]

After one week, the post-test was administered without prior announcement. The post-test was the same as the pre-test but with the order of questions randomized to prevent rote memorization of answers.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

A summary of results of the above-mentioned questionnaire after pre-testing is shown in Figure 5, below. The questionnaire first asked how much the students could recognize and understand dative constructions at the time of pre-test. As regards the fill-in-the-blank questions, in both classes most of the students remembered learning the grammar rules, but it turned out that not a few students showed little confidence as to their answers to the questions. The majority of the responses to the open-ended question (i.e. how well do you remember the grammar rules used in this test?) indicated that they tended to remember them from having learned them by heart after reciting them many times. As the questionnaire results show, students with low English proficiency tended to have insufficient understanding or knowledge of dative constructions before the experiment, which means that this study could be worth examining closely by researchers.

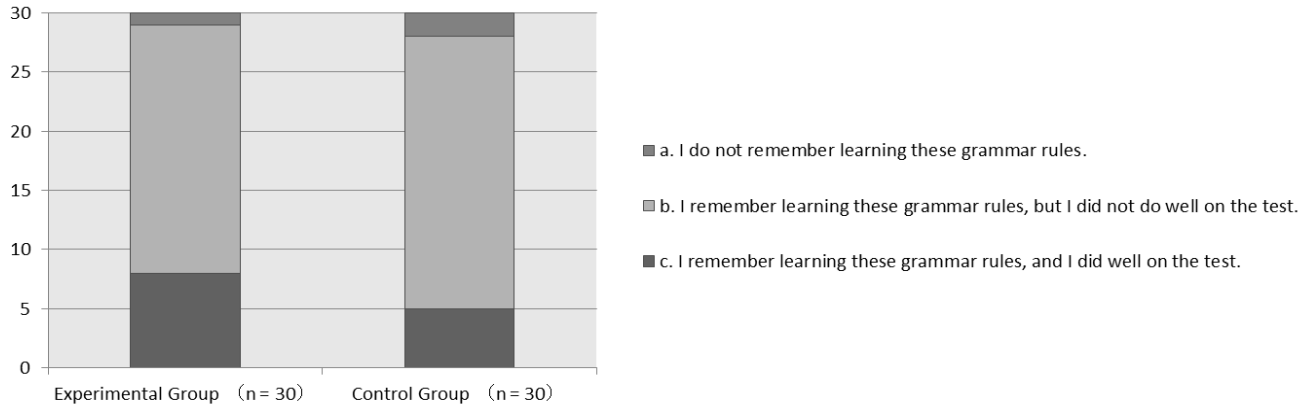


Figure 5. The results from the pre-test questionnaire.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for the pre- and post-test (maximum score: 20)

	Group	*n*	*M*	*SD*	*Min.*	*Max.*
pretest	Experimental	30	7.83	2.60	4	12
	Control	30	6.60	2.54	0	10
posttest	Experimental	30	11.47	2.85	4	16
	Control	30	7.67	3.10	3	15

Note . *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation

Table 4, above, represents the descriptive statistics for the pre- and post-test. In order to achieve the objectives of this study, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) tests were run.[24] The results showed that there are significant differences between the two groups in favor of the post-test scores at the level of p <.01: the students' achievement improved significantly in the experimental group (F (1, 56) = 18.94, p <.01). Figure 6, below, presents the overall results for the mean scores on the pre-test and post-test in the two groups.

In conclusion, the newly-proposed CLI techniques did improve low level learners' comprehension for dative constructions. This research basically supports the findings of a previous study,[8] in which the semantics of *give* and *make* were focused on. As mentioned above, the students who took part in this study were of low-end English proficiency, so the approach used in the previous study was hard for them to accept because of its complicated nature.[15] Our results show that incorporating visual representations of these two verbs could offer a promising and effective new method for Japanese low-proficiency EFL learners. In other words, the potential of visual aids to aid in the learning of the target language must be recognized in classrooms with low-proficiency level. It can quickly gain students' attention and encourage them to pay more attention to, and possibly yield better performance in, the target language.

In order to examine which verbs were easier to entrench in students' memories, the number of correct answers given by low-proficiency Japanese EFL learners for each verb in the pre- and post-test are presented in Figures 7 and 8, on the following page, for the experimental and control group, respectively. The control group scored similarly on the post-test and the pre-test. On the other hand, the experimental group showed a two-fold increase in scores for *show*, *kick* and *sell* for *give*-type verbs and *cook*, *sing* and *buy* for *make*-type verbs. This may be due to the students easily associating these verbs with the basic semantics of *give* and *make* with each visual representation. It is worthy of special note that the experimental group acquire little knowledge the very basic verbs such as *take* and *read* even after receiving the CLI method. These results lead us to believe there is a strong need to provide in-depth guidance on basic verbs for low-proficiency Japanese EFL learners without presuming that they have already learned and mastered the function and meaning of basic verbs: first and foremost, vocabulary is requisite knowledge for proper language learning.

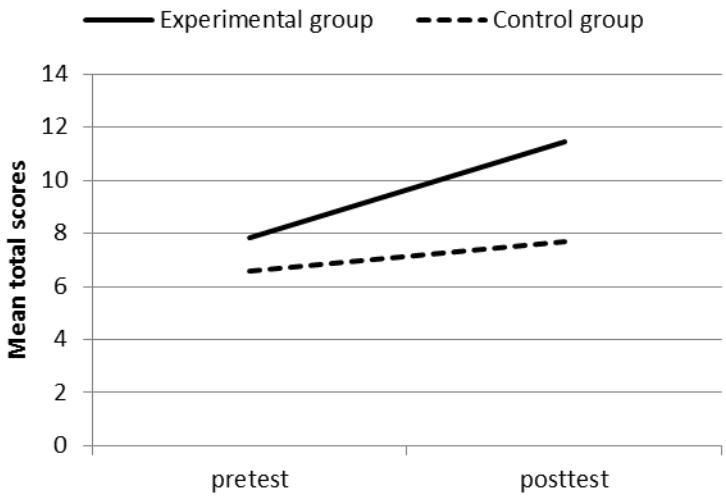
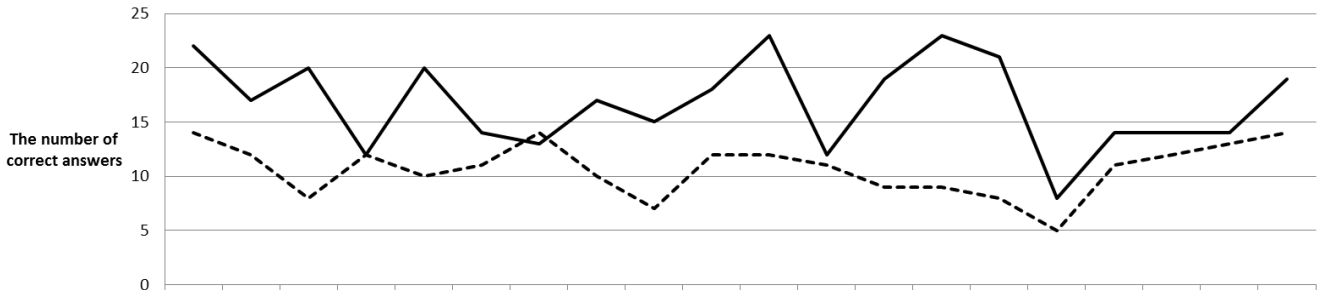


Figure 6. The mean scores of the pre-test and post-test in experimental and control groups.



	give	teach	show	read	kick	tell	take	send	sell	pass	make	play	cook	sing	buy	win	call	get	find	build
pretest	14	12	8	12	10	11	14	10	7	12	12	11	9	9	8	5	11	12	13	14
posttest	22	17	20	12	20	14	13	17	15	18	23	12	19	23	21	8	14	14	14	19

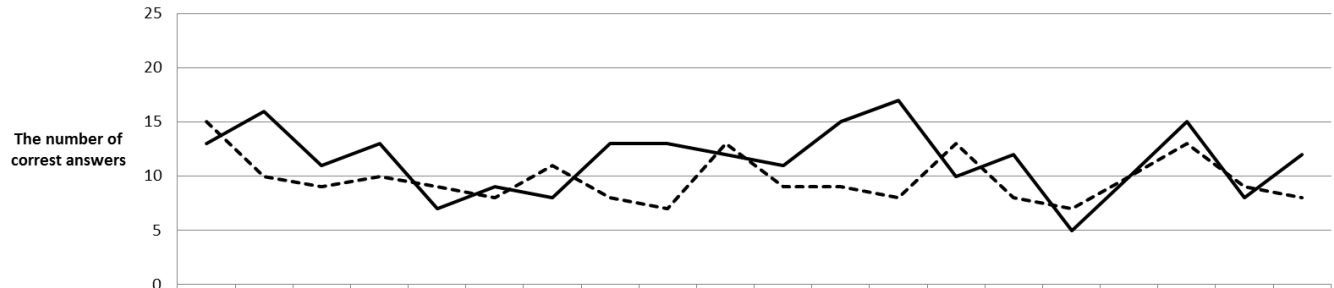
Figure 7. The number of correct answers for each verb in the experimental group.

5. Concluding Remarks and Implications for Future Research

As indicated several times throughout this study, the main aim of the research has been to explore how to effectively teach dative constructions to low-proficiency Japanese university students and examine the effectiveness of CLI techniques. An earlier study has suggested that the CLI method could gear students up for learning language via improved comprehension and awareness. For EFL learners in Japan, there are insufficient opportunities for input, let alone output: students have little exposure to English in daily life. This leads us to believe that because of limited class time constraints instructors should reflect upon and discuss the most effective forms of English input available and how and where they should be used in EFL settings. *Give* and *make,* as the most prototypical verbs to appear in *to*-dative and *for*-dative constructions, respectively, have a form and meaning that could enhance Japanese EFL learners' use of these constructions. Applying this form of instruction to the EFL classrooms with low-proficiency students is never likely to be straightforward because these student are generally considered to be unmotivated after long-time exposure to mandatory rote English instruction and learning. It is rather easy to imagine that there might be a bigger, i.e. more difficult to overcome, hurdle to learning English facing students who have already encountered setbacks and disappointments in their learning as opposed to students who are starting fresh at learning a foreign language: they will have a harder time seizing opportunities to restart their language learning even though entering a new environment (e.g. college or university). In order to trigger new motivation that may remain dormant within themselves and help navigate through obstacles they have faced during the learning process, a new way of English teaching beyond conventional memorization is necessary.

The limitations of this study are several. First of all, the sample size was small and this reduced possibilities for finding differences between the two groups. Another limitation of this experiment was in the newly created test for selecting the appropriate prepositions in POCs. The test consisted of 20 multiple choice questions that had only two possible answers (i.e. *to* or *for*). Students were possibly able to arrive at high scores by "gambling" on the answers randomly. Therefore, any test to measure participants' performance should undergo further investigation for validity and reliability.

However, the findings of the current study have a lot to offer. Before the experiment, the biggest concern of the instructor was uncertainty about whether university students with low-proficiency would be



	give	teach	show	read	kick	tell	take	send	sell	pass	make	play	cook	sing	buy	win	call	get	find	build
pretest	15	10	9	10	9	8	11	8	7	13	9	9	8	13	8	7	10	13	9	8
posttest	13	16	11	13	7	9	8	13	13	12	11	15	17	10	12	5	10	15	8	12

Figure 8. The number of correct answers for each verb in the control group.

willing to tackle an activity based on the CLI instruction, but we can say that this research turned out to be fruitful at least in terms of its raising of grammar-consciousness. While instruction was being given to the experimental group, the author was pleasantly surprised to see the students engaging in the activity more enthusiastically than expected. Although this methodology included no formal post-activity questionnaire, it seemed that most of the students in the experimental group could acknowledge the importance of learning grammar. Here are some positive comments made by some students after the whole experiment:

- It was interesting to know that the meaning of a verb can motivate its syntactic structure.
- I find it more refreshing to learn what I have never learned before.
- The activity was enjoyable. I will focus on not only the meaning of a verb but its usage.

Based on this positive reaction, we strongly believe that a Cognitive Linguistics-inspired approach based on authentic language use might be the doorway to generating motivation and increased consciousness in low-proficiency EFL learners with negative views towards language learning.

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Appendix

A test for selecting appropriate prepositions in prepositional object constructions (POCs)
(Translation in English from the original instruction in Japanese)

In English, dative alternation means the alternation between a prepositional object construction (POC) as in [SVO *to*/*for* O] and a double object construction (DOC) as in [SVOO]. Some verbs take *to* and others take *for* in the POCs. Fill in the blank with either "to" or "for."

1)	John showed Mary a picture.	⇔	John showed a picture ( ) Mary.
2)	John called Mary a taxi.	⇔	John called a taxi ( ) Mary.
3)	John built Mary the house.	⇔	John built the house ( ) Mary.
4)	John kicked Mary the ball.	⇔	John kicked the ball ( ) Mary.
5)	John won Mary the award.	⇔	John won the award ( ) Mary.
6)	John made Mary a cake.	⇔	John made a cake ( ) Mary.
7)	John got Mary a book.	⇔	John got a book ( ) Mary.
8)	John read Mary a book.	⇔	John read a book ( ) Mary.
9)	John bought Mary a book.	⇔	John bought a book ( ) Mary.
10)	John sent Mary a card.	⇔	John sent a card ( ) Mary.
11)	John taught Mary English.	⇔	John taught English ( ) Mary.
12)	John passed Mary a book.	⇔	John passed a book ( ) Mary.
13)	John sold Mary a flower.	⇔	John sold a flower ( ) Mary.
14)	John gave Mary a book.	⇔	John gave a book ( ) Mary.
15)	John found Mary a book.	⇔	John found a book ( ) Mary.
16)	John took Mary a glass of water.	⇔	John took a glass of water ( ) Mary.
17)	John sang Mary a song.	⇔	John sang a song ( ) Mary.
18)	John told Mary the story.	⇔	John told the story ( ) Mary.
19)	John cooked Mary dinner.	⇔	John cooked dinner ( ) Mary.
20)	John played Mary the song.	⇔	John played the song ( ) Mary.