

日本人 EFL 学習者の文章作成における因果関係の誤り —— so の使用の例 ——

Pragmalinguistic Errors on a Cause-and-Effect Relationship in Japanese EFL Learners' Writing: A Case of the Use of 'So'

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Keywords 語用論言語学的エラー, エラー分析, 接続語 so, 英語ライティング, 母語転移
pragmalinguistic errors, error analysis, conjunction, so, writing, L1 transfer

ABSTRACT

本研究は、日本人 EFL 学習者のパラグラフ・ライティングにおける因果関係の語用論言語学的エラーを探るものである。語用論言語学的エラーとは、語用論的影響力が言語化された場合の食い違いによって引き起こされる言語の問題を指す。大学2年生が書いた53の英語パラグラフを、接続副詞の使用に焦点を当てて調べた。接続副詞は、文・節・句を論理的につなぐものであり、書き手が示したい原因と結果の関係を記述する上で重要な役割を果たしている。また、語彙や構文などの間違いのほかに、副詞の so の使用頻度が therefore や as a result よりも高いことがわかった。このことから、副詞の so を使うことで、語用論的に誤った意味が伝わり、因果関係が損なわれている恐れがあることも示唆された。本研究では、これらの語用論的な誤りの原因についても考察し、接続詞 so に関する教授インプットの不足、so の用法の多様性、そして so とそれに対応する日本語表現との類似点などが指摘された。

This study explores the Japanese English as second language learners' pragmalinguistic errors in the use of conjunction *so*, which may lead to incorrect cause-and-effect relationships in their English paragraph writings. Pragmalinguistic errors refer to a linguistic problem caused by differences in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force. Fifty-three English paragraphs written by university sophomores were examined with focus on the use of conjunctions and conjunctive adverbials. Conjunctive adverbials logically connect

sentences, clauses, and phrases and play a significant role in describing the relationship between a cause and an effect that writers intend to show. Besides lexical, syntactic, and other mistakes, it was found that students used a conjunction *so* more frequently than *therefore* and *as a result*. However, their usage of *so* often conveyed pragmatically wrong meanings, which led to impairment of cause-and-effect relationships in their writings. The study also discusses the possible causes of these pragmalinguistic errors: i.e., less instructional input of conjunction *so*, various meanings and usage of *so*, and some similarities between *so* and Japanese counterpart expressions.

1. Introduction

English as foreign language (EFL) learners' writing may usually involve not only lexical and syntactic but also pragmatic errors. Pragmatics, a branch of linguistics, studies the relations between language and context that are basic to understand language in communication (Levinson, 1983). Pragmatic failure appears to provoke serious problems in spoken interaction and so does in writing. Pragmatic errors in writing may prevent the writer from conveying the intended meaning or expressing the writer's intention more severely than syntactic errors. Pragmalinguistics is a sub-category of pragmatics and is usually contrasted with sociopragmatics. Thomas (1983) distinguished pragmalinguistic errors from sociopragmatic errors: pragmalinguistic errors are basically a linguistic problem caused by differences in the linguistic encoding of pragmatic force, while sociopragmatic failure arises from cross-culturally different perceptions of appropriate linguistic behaviour. Following Thomas, the author calls the errors targeted in this study pragmalinguistic errors since the study intends to examine the pragmatically incorrect effects of learner expressions and relationships between phrases, clauses, or sentences with relation to syntactic structures.

In the non-English-major environment of Japanese universities, first and second year students seem to have few opportunities to learn to some extent formal English writing as a course assignment.

College compulsory English classes tend to spare more time on teaching reading and listening than writing, and students' grades are often assessed by tests and examinations rather than writing assignments. In the required English courses, it is likely that students learn writing skills at the level of sentences or a few connected sentences in English composition to consolidate the grammatical items they have learned, while they have few experiences to write coherent sentences such as paragraphs and essays. As a result, they may end up in the first or second year of an introductory university course without acquiring the text-composing skills to express their thoughts and ideas appropriately.

This study examined the writings of EFL sophomore students in two required elective English classes at a Japanese co-educational university in Kanagawa prefecture. Fifty-three argumentative paragraphs submitted by students were examined with a close look at their pragmalinguistic errors. The study employs a mixed-methods design with an explanatory sequential model: quantitative data of cause-effect conjunctions by Japanese students and corpus data of native English speakers followed by qualitative data of Japanese students' paragraph writings. When the writing is assessed, although whether the writer's intention is clearly expressed or not is the most significant point, some of the writings are likely to fail in communicating correct meaning and seemed difficult to understand. In particular, after a quick look around, the author got the impression that many students preferred to

use a particular conjunction *so* in their writing, although it was not taught at any time in class. Based on the situation, the study examines the types and frequency of occurrence of conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs/adverbials and investigates whether and in what way some of them may lead to pragmalinguistic errors students have committed. It explicitly focuses on the consistency of the cause-and-effect relationship in the use of conjunction *so*. The paper also discusses the possible causes of students' frequent use of *so* from multiple perspectives. This study aims to seek ways to develop the instruction of English paragraph writing and help students improve English writing skills. Accordingly, the study has set the following research questions:

- (1) What conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs do Japanese EFL undergraduates most frequently use to express cause-and-effect relationships in English paragraph writing?
- (2) In what way does the use of conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs by Japanese EFL undergraduates lead to pragmalinguistic errors regarding the cause-and-effect relationships in their paragraph writings?
- (3) What are the possible causes for Japanese undergraduates to frequently use particular conjunction for cause-and-effect?

2. Analyzing Learner Errors

2.1 Error Analysis and Pragmalinguistic Errors

Learners' errors have been of great interest to researchers in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). Contrastive Analysis (Lado, 1957), which developed and attracted people's attention in 1950s and 1960s, studied learners' errors largely in comparison with the first language (L1) and the second language (L2). Contrastive Analysis considered that errors were what should be corrected for learners to become more competent

in the target language and assumed that the most significant cause of learner errors was the interference from the learners' L1. Contrastive Analysis claimed that it was possible to predict learners' errors by identifying the linguistic areas where differences between L1 and L2 exist and where the L1 interference occurs. Replacing Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis developed to become the first approach focusing on learners' creating construction of L2. While Contrastive Analysis attempted to make comparison on idealized language structures of the native speakers of L1 and L2, Error Analysis focused on actual errors made by L2 learners (Saville-Troike, 2006). The advent of Error Analysis changed the SLA researchers' and practitioners' views on learner errors, that is, learner errors appeared to provide evidence of their learning processes and problems, analysis and explanations about learner difficulties in L2 learning, and valuable information for L2 teaching (Saville-Troike, 2006; Fauziati, 2014). Furthermore, as Corder (1967) emphasizes, the most significant point of making errors is that it is a device or a strategy the learners use to learn a second language and improve themselves further.

Error Analysis classified learner errors into *interlingual errors*, which are influenced by L1, and *intralingual errors*, which take place within the target language itself. Intralingual errors classification has been efficiently used in second language research and pedagogy to identify the different types of errors according to the processes. Richards & Schmidt (1985) provided a list of seven error types with brief explanations: overgeneralization, simplification, developmental errors, communication-based errors, training-induced errors, errors of avoidance, and overproduction. Overgeneralization refers to errors caused by extension of target language rules to inappropriate contexts. Overgeneralization is a well-observed phenomenon in L2 learning, as the following example shows: *I knowed his mother*

well, where the verb form error results from a general rule of verb tense. Beniak and Mougeon (as cited in Thomas, 1983, p.103) suggest that “where errors reflect L1 interference and L2 overgeneralization, they reinforce one another and are more difficult to overcome.”

Simplification refers to errors resulting from learners producing simpler linguistic rules than those found in the target language. An example of simplification involves the use of simple present form instead of the present perfect form. Developmental errors are errors reflecting natural stages of development, and communication-based errors are resulting from the strategies of communication. Induced errors are errors resulting from the transfer of training. This type is also called hypercorrection, in which the teachers’ excess efforts in correcting students’ errors sometimes induce the students to make errors in otherwise correct forms (Touchie, 1987). Errors of avoidance refer to errors resulting from failure to use certain target language structures because they are thought to be too difficult. The last one, overproduction refers to structures used too frequently (Richards & Schmidt, 1985). However, it seems impossible to attribute errors to one particular source since causal factors may combine with others, including L1 influence.

Much research shows that the most prominent cause of second language learners’ pragmalinguistic errors is L1 transfer (e.g., Blakemore, 1988; Brown, 2007; Thomas, 1987; Widanta, Hudiananingsih, Sitawati, & Ardika, 2019; Yusuf, 2018). The influence of a learner’s L1 is inevitable in language acquisition processes and can increase when it affects L2 learning in combination with other factors such as L2 competence and language training. Brown (2007) suggests that beginning learners are quite vulnerable to L1 transfer because L1 is the only previous linguistic system for them before they become competent in the target

language. Furthermore, learners’ lack of target language knowledge, together with the mother tongue influence, can be a causal factor of making errors (Brown, 2007). Yusuf (2018) also found that intermediate-level students’ L1 transfer was as twice as higher than advanced-level students’ and suggested that their lack of pragmalinguistic competence may provoke syntactic and lexical errors in writing. Moreover, L1 transfer involved transfer of L1 pragmatic knowledge. Investigating the Indonesian students’ pragmalinguistic errors in discourse completion tests, Widanta, Hudiananingsih, Sitawati, and Ardika (2019) illustrated that learners with lower L2 competence are more easily influenced by L1 transfer because they rely on their L1 as a result of their less competence of L2 pragmatic knowledge.

Errors and mistakes are distinguished in the field of SLA. Ellis (1997) states that errors should be studied differently from such things like an accidental slip of tongue:

Errors reflect gaps in a learner’s knowledge; they occur because the learner does not know what is correct. Mistakes reflect occasional lapses in performance; they occur because, in a particular instance, the learner is unable to perform what he or she knows. (Ellis, 1997, p.17)

2.2 Studies on the Use of *So*

So has many different meanings with different syntactic forms as an adverb, as a conjunction, and as a pronoun. This research focuses on the use of a discourse particle *so* as a conjunction. Discourse particles are “syntactically optional elements which have no or little propositional value but are rich in pragmatic meanings which vary according to the context in which they occur” (Lam, 2009, p. 354). As well as *and*, *but*, and *or*, *so* works as a coordinating conjunction that relates causes with results. Furthermore, *so* as a conjunction expresses

mostly the same meaning as *therefore*, *consequently*, and *as a result*. Yan and Chen (2015), in their study on coordinating conjunctions *but* and *however*, point out that Chinese EFL learners tend to overuse *but*, and use *however* in the position different from native speakers. Although discourse particles and their usages are well-researched area of SLA, research on *so* is quite scarce. Of those few, Blakemore (1988) must be the most well-read study in the field. According to Blakemore (1998), *so* works as an inferential marker in a sentence or an utterance, that is, a conjunction that relates an inference in the second proposition to a first proposition before *so*. Using the following example sentence, Blakemore (1998, p.184) explains that the hearer is expected to establish an inferential connection between the two propositions presented: “There was \$5 in his wallet. *So* he hadn’t spent all the money.” This inferential function of *so* is also observed across speakers in conversation; for instance, the second speaker or an interlocutor can continue the first speaker’s utterance by starting his/her utterance with *so* (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). Lam (2009) is another study of *so* with in-depth examination based on corpus data. Using a spoken corpus of Hong Kong English, it was shown that *so* is used differently in different text types: it is used most frequently in academic monologues such as lectures and presentations, as a textual framing device in segmenting discourse, and as a response in dialogues; on the other hand, it appeared less in public situations like press briefing, radio announcement, and public speeches (Lam, 2009). Integrating the findings from existing research, Müller (2005) investigated the use of *so* as a discourse marker and a non-discourse marker, compared with other discourse markers such as *well* and *you know* in the corpus, and found that *so* as the non-discourse marker (e.g., as adverb of degree) is more used by non-native speakers than native speakers. Lam (2009) suggests that

contextual cues are necessary to understand the functions of *so* thoroughly.

3. Method

This study employs a mixed-methods design with an explanatory sequential model. The quantitative data include the list of cause-effect conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs/adverbials used by Japanese undergraduates and MICUSP data of native English speakers in the United States. Qualitative data include the extracted erroneous part of Japanese students’ paragraph writings. Results of the data are integrated and discussed to draw a conclusion.

3.1 Participants and Research Context

The study was conducted at a co-educational university in Kanagawa. Participants for this study were fifty-three university students, including fourteen females and thirty-nine males, aged 19 to 23. They were from two classes of the Second-Year English course provided as the selected requirements for informatics-major students. When the final writing was assigned, students were informed that their writings might be analyzed and used for class development and research purposes with anonymity guaranteed and asked to check the box in the online consent form if they agreed with the statement. They were also told that whether they agreed or not would not affect their assessment or grade in this course. Fifty-three out of sixty students signed (checked) the form. The participants had lower intermediate to intermediate levels of English proficiency and varied learning motivation. According to the responses for a preliminary questionnaire, most of them had little or no experience learning English writing in the academic level.

Due to the widespread pandemic, both classes were conducted online by combining the real-time

zoom connection and on-demand lessons using a learning management system (LMS). These two classes I taught were mostly identical in terms of teaching content, materials, procedure, class delivery, and assessment systems, and focused on English writing, broad world knowledge, and critical thinking opportunity on various topics.

3.2 Data Collection

Fifty-three student paragraphs submitted as the final course assignment were examined for this study. Students were asked to write a 150-200 word problem-solving paragraph on the topic “How to reduce children’s time of playing video-games.” During the course, students learned writing various types of paragraphs and linking words and phrases appropriate for them. The target of the research was the conjunctions expressing cause and effect relationship in argumentative writing. Those items included subordinating conjunctions such as *because* and *since*; sentence connectors *therefore*, *as a result*, *consequently*, *hence*, and *thus*; and phrase-linkers *because of*, *due to*, and *as a result of*. In addition, Michigan Corpus of Upper Level Student Papers (MICUSP) was used to examine the use of *so* in the native English speaking students’ papers. MICUSP involves papers with A grade from the University of Michigan written for upper undergraduate and early graduate courses.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

For analysis, errors targeted for this research were identified as follows: (1) language level: pragmalinguistic problems; (2) linguistic category: conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs; and (3) specific linguistic elements: *so*, *therefore*. First, all the conjunctions and conjunctive adverbials in student paragraphs were picked out and the number of each conjunction was calculated. Among them, the conjunction *so* was examined in more details by identifying the specific meaning of *so* in different

use in writings and classifying them according to the functions (whether an item is used for expressing causes or effects). Table 3 in the results section shows a list of the students’ use of *so*. These results were discussed integrating the results from MICUSP.

4. Results

4.1 Results of Students’ Use of Conjunctions

Table 1 shows the results of frequency of conjunctions and conjunctive adverbials found in the participants’ English writings. Conjunctions and conjunctive adverbials are parts of speech used to connect a clause to another. These conjunctions are also used to show comparison and contrast, cause and effect, sequence, and other relationships. As for *so* in the first line of the frequency row, the number in square brackets with an asterisk shows the number of *so* used to tell cause and effect relationship. In the category of causes and reasons, it appeared that *so* occurred 43 times, which was the most frequent in this list. The number of *so* used for the cause and effect occurred 33 times. Both *therefore* and *as a result* occurred 7 times,

Table 1
Frequency of Conjunctions / Conjunctive Adverbs in Japanese EFL Undergraduates’ English Writings

Function	Conjunction / Conjunctive Adverbials	Frequency
	<i>so</i>	43 [33]*
	<i>therefore</i>	7
	<i>consequently</i>	3
Effect/ Result	<i>as a result</i>	7
	<i>as a result of</i>	1
	<i>thus</i>	0
	<i>hence</i>	0
Cause/ Reason	<i>because</i>	28
	<i>since</i>	3
	<i>because of</i>	8
	<i>due to</i>	16

Note. The number in square bracket shows the number of *so* used to tell cause and effect relationship.

consequently occurred 3 times, and *as a result of* occurred only once. *Thus* and *hence* did not occur in student writings.

To sum up, it appears that frequency of occurrence of conjunction *so* is considerably high comparing to other conjunctions.

4.2 Results from MICUSP

To examine the use of *so* and other conjunctions by native English speakers (NS) and non-native English speakers (NNS), the Michigan Corpus of Upper-Level Student Papers (MICUSP) was used. The frequency of occurrence of conjunctions *so*, *therefore*, and *as a result* was searched in two disciplines of English and sociology at senior undergraduate (SU) level of argumentative essay paper type with seven textual features including abstract, definitions, discussion of results, literature review, methodology section, and problem-solution pattern. As shown in Table 2, the results revealed that *so* occurred 203 times in forty papers, *therefore* occurred 30 times in 19 papers, and *as a result* occurred 10 times in 10 papers by NS. In the same situation by NNS, *so* occurred 25 times in six papers, *therefore* occurred 2 times in one paper, and *as a result* occurred only one time in one paper.

These results show that *so* seems to be used more frequently than other conjunctions by undergraduate students.

This study also made a close look at the meaning and function of *so* and compared the use of *so* by Japanese university students with students in MICUSP. In the first line of SU level, the numbers in square brackets show the number of *so* used to tell cause and effect relationship. Results indicate that the conjunction *so* with the meaning of *therefore* occurred only 15 times by NS, and 3 times by NNS.

4.3 The Students' Use of So in Their Writing

Table 3 shows the extracted examples of student-written sentences containing pragmalinguistic errors with the use of *so*. Here, sentences with inappropriate cause-and-effect relationships are considered as pragmalinguistic errors. In particular, those sentences in which the use of *so* with the meaning of *therefore* or *consequently* made the cause-and-effect relationship insufficient or ambiguous are picked up. In order to focus on pragmalinguistic aspects of errors, grammatical errors will not be mentioned as long as they are not considered to deviate from the original meaning.

Table 2

Occurrence of three conjunctions in native and non-native students' papers with different student levels in the Michigan Corpus of Upper-Level Student Papers (MICUSP)

Student Level	The Number of Conjunctions and the Number of Papers					
	so		therefore		as a result	
	NS	NNS	NS	NNS	NS	NNS
SU	203 (40) [15]*	25 (6) [3]*	30 (19)	2 (1)	10 (10)	1 (1)
G1	49 (8)	20 (4)	22 (7)	1 (1)	8 (3)	3 (3)
G2	34 (7)	0 (4)	8 (3)	0 (1)	4 (2)	0 (1)
G3	21 (4)	13 (2)	13 (3)	9 (3)	0 (2)	1 (1)

Note. The numbers in square brackets show the number of *so* used to tell cause and effect relationship. The numbers in parentheses show the number of papers involving each conjunction. Student levels and nativeness are abbreviated as follows: SU: Senior Undergraduate; G1: 1st Year Graduate; G2: 2nd Year Graduate; G3: 3rd Year Graduate; NS: native English speaker; and NNS: non-native English speaker.

Table 3*Extracts of sentences containing pragmalinguistic errors with the use of so*

	Error	Explanation for Correction
1	There are different games for each genre, <u>so</u> , you can buy them.	Causal errors. The preceding and following propositions are not properly connected.
2	Games are not boring but fun compared to studying, <u>so</u> it's hard to stop games.	Causal errors. The preceding and following propositions are not properly connected.
3	Because I don't want to lose pocket money, <u>so</u> I want to keep time. As a result, I reduce average time spent for video games	The propositions before and after <i>so</i> do not correspond to each other because the direct reason is missing.
4	I think change the environment is a need. For these reasons, <u>so</u> I think number of suicide has increased recently.	The double use of conjunctions and conjunctive adverbials exists.
5	Because currently unemployment rate has been increased, <u>so</u> poor student can't pay tuition, <u>so</u> they have to quit university or high school. <u>So</u> , they lost their lives.	<i>So</i> is used too frequently, and this makes the sentence redundant and hard to understand.
6	It is important for parents and children to set rules for playing video games. <u>So</u> , parents themselves have to learn about video games.	The propositions before and after <i>so</i> do not correspond to each other because the direct reason is missing.
7	At home children play a game with friends through communication. <u>So</u> what can we do to change that mindset?	The propositions before and after <i>so</i> do not correspond to each other because the direct reason is missing.
8	Children are curious creatures. <u>So</u> , if they find something interesting, they will spend more time on it, <u>so</u> I think the game time should be reduced.	The propositions before and after <i>so</i> do not correspond to each other because the direct reason is missing.
9	Do you know the "screen time" with smartphone and Mimamori setting with Nintendo Switch? <u>So</u> , kids can't use devices after limiting time.	The propositions before and after <i>so</i> do not correspond to each other because the direct reason is missing.
10	We need to teach that games are reward after doing what you should do. <u>So</u> , they follow it and will save the time.	The propositions before and after <i>so</i> do not correspond to each other because the first proposition states necessary actions, not reasons.
11	Children often play games alone. <u>So</u> , I think if we want to solve the problem, they need to cooperate with parents.	Propositions before and after <i>so</i> have different subjects. This makes the writer's intention blurred and causal relationship weak.
12	The main causes of suicide are health problems, economic and living problems, and family problems. <u>So</u> , I thought that suicides are increasing.	The propositions before and after <i>so</i> do not correspond to each other because the direct reason is missing.
13	If we play the game too much, we will not be able to distinguish between real and virtual space. <u>So</u> , we play games for a long time.	The propositions before and after <i>so</i> do not correspond to each other because the direct reason is missing.
14	There are many fun things to do indoors. <u>So</u> , I do read, play games, and see movies.	The propositions before and after <i>so</i> do not correspond to each other. To read, play games, and see movies are examples of what to do indoors.
15	In contrast, I love playing games. <u>So</u> , I think playing game is a lot of fun.	The propositions before and after <i>so</i> do not correspond to each other. They are not in a cause-effect relationship. If the order of the two sentences is opposite, the relationship may be established.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 So as the Most Frequently used Conjunction

It was found that in their writings, although Japanese student participants adequately used the conjunctions that they learned in class (e.g., conjunctions for addition, adversativity, clarification, comparison, and illustration), there was a problem with the use of conjunction and conjunctive adverbs of causality. As a response to Research Question (1) “What conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs do Japanese EFL undergraduates most frequently use to express cause-and-effect relationships in English paragraph writing?”, it was found that *so* was the most frequently used by participants. Interestingly, students used the conjunction *so* much more frequently than *therefore* and *as a result* to show cause and effect relationship in their writings. This result seems somewhat curious because although the students have studied various conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs, they have never been formally instructed the conjunction *so* in class.

5.2 Pragmalinguistic Errors Caused by the Use of So

Responding to Research Question (2) “In what way does the use of conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs by Japanese EFL undergraduates lead to pragmalinguistic errors regarding the cause-and-effect relationships in their paragraph writings?”, cause-and-effect sentences with causal conjunction *so* were extracted and examined. Students’ use of *so* in their writing was reasonable in some cases but inappropriate in others, and the sentences where *so* was used inappropriately caused causality problems. The most prominent phenomenon is that propositions before and after *so* do not correspond to each other properly because the direct reason is missing. Some sentences skipped over the direct reason or cause and immediately wrote about the

concluding result or predicted effect after *so*, while in other sentences propositions before and after *so* are located in the opposite position. While writing in a second language, learners are likely to overlook the correct relationship between cause and effect as they excessively focus on choosing vocabulary and making sentences.

5.3 Possible Reasons of Students’ Frequent Use of So

Research Question (3) asked “*What are the possible reasons for Japanese undergraduates to frequently use particular conjunction?*” The findings from this study suggest three possible causes of why *so* was used the most frequently: relation between students’ use of *so* and instructional input; the complexity of *so* with its diverse meanings; and similarities between *so* and Japanese counterpart expressions.

5.3.1 Insufficient Instructional Input about the Use of So

There are deviations in causality in the propositions before and after *so*. To be precise, close examination of student writings can see that there is a leap between cause and effect and that these relationships are not closely aligned. When students try to use *therefore* to connect sentences or phrases, they may pay more attention to content relationships, because they have been taught in class that *therefore* is a tool for showing cause-and-effect relationships, and they have solved exercises on it. On the other hand, when they try to use a particular word that has not been explicitly taught in class, they have to rely on their own knowledge and experience because they have little idea about the correct usage of the word. Since they have only limited experience in learning English writing, they may predict the usage of *so* from the English they have read or heard. Furthermore, it seems that the characteristics of *so* and the students’ L1 influence

are possible causal factors. The notion is congruent with earlier description that main causes of pragmalinguistic errors are L1 transfer and the influence of training (e.g., Blakemore, 1988; Thomas, 1987).

5.3.2 Diverse Meanings of So

So is a small particle, but has a complex nature. The fact that the teacher (i.e., this author) did not teach them detailed knowledge about *so* in the class may have resulted in them using *so* frequently at their own discretion. Learners tend to think that longer words are difficult or complex and prefer using shorter words that are seemingly easy to use (Matsuoka, 2017). As a result, a short word *so* might be used by students more positively than *therefore* and *consequently*. In reality, however, small English words such as *so* have many different usages and meanings, and can be combined with other words to express completely different content. Teachers need to teach them carefully so that they can use the word correctly.

Conjunction *so* is much more commonly used in verbal utterances than other conjunctive expressions that are more associated with writings, such as *consequently*, *therefore*, and *as a result*. As Lam (2009) points out, *so* is commonly observed in oral responses in dialogues and monologic speech that a speaker has not fully prepared. Accordingly, it is predictable that beginners and lower-intermediate learners may use colloquial expressions in substitute for their lack of L2 knowledge.

5.3.3 Similarities between So and Japanese Counterpart Expressions

The Japanese language has some expressions that are similar to English *so* in meaning, sound, and usage. The following examples will illustrate. In each pair, sentences a and b show almost the same meaning in English and Japanese.

- (1) The following sentences 1.a and 1.b have mostly the same meaning. An English particle *so* in 1.a is used as an adverb and used instead of repeating what has just been said. The pronunciation is also similar for English *so* (/sóʊ/) and Japanese *sou* (/sɔ:/)
 1. a. [English]: I think so.
 1. b. [Japanese]: sou (or so) omou
- (2) Sentences 2.a and 2.b have mostly the same meaning. English particle *so* in 2.a is used as an adverb and means ‘very’ or ‘quite’ to emphasize the subsequent adjectives.
 2. a. [English]: This is so heavy.
 2. b. [Japanese]: Kore ha, soutou (or soto)/ *sugoku* omoi!
- (3) Sentences 3.a and 3.b below have mostly the same meaning. In 3.a, *so* is used as a conjunction to connect the sentences before and after *so*. The first proposition in the first sentence provides a cause for the effect described in the second proposition, the person’s sleepiness.
 3. a. [English]: I got up early this morning. So, I’m sleepy now.
 3. b. [Japanese]: Kesa ha hayaku okita, Sorede ima ha nemui.
- (4) Sentences 4.a and 4.b have mostly the same meaning. In 4.a, *so* is used as a pronoun instead of repeating what has just been said. Japanese *sou* in 4.b also expresses the fact that he is still afraid of dogs.
 4. a. [English]: He was afraid of dogs when he was a child, and still is so.
 4. b. [Japanese]: Kare ha kodomo no toki inu wo osoreteita ga, imamo sou (or so) da.
- (5) Sentences 5.a and 5.b have mostly the same meaning. Like *so* in English, Japanese *sou* is frequently used in conversation as a backchannel.

It is also often used to express a person's many different feelings, such as light agreement, surprise, interest, doubt, and mild criticism.

5. a [English]: Is that *so*? (a backchannel response)
5. b [Japanese]: *Sou (so) nano?* / *Sou (so)?* (a backchannel or a light agreement)

Due to the resembling aspects of *so* in L2 English and its L1 Japanese counterpart mentioned above, it is quite understandable that Japanese students have an intimacy for this small discourse particle and use it frequently because they find it easy to use. If Japanese students use a certain word with familiarity due to the influence of L1 as described above, it would be reasonable to call this L1 transfer. However, this study only compared the meanings of *so* and its Japanese counterpart, and the syntactic structure of Japanese sentences with Japanese *sou* and historical origins of the Japanese *sou* need to be more properly examined.

6. Conclusion

This paper examined the Japanese EFL undergraduates' pragmalinguistic errors in their writings, focusing on the use of a cause-and-effect conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs. Results of the examination of fifty-three student papers show that *so* is the most frequently occurred conjunction. In their writings, some wrong use of *so* included the dislocation, missing, and inappropriateness of propositions before and after *so*, and these misuses appeared to lead to pragmalinguistic errors in cause-and-effect relationships in a paragraph. The study also discussed the possible reasons of Japanese university students' frequent use of *so* and pointed out three main reasons: the influence of insufficient instructional input on students' use of *so*; the complexity of *so* with its diverse meanings; and similarities between *so* and Japanese counterpart

expressions. The findings, as mentioned earlier, suggest the colloquiality of *so*. Since *so* is a familiar colloquial expression, it is not considered appropriate for some academic writing. However, the use of *so* is acceptable for English writing that is not so advanced or academic in nature, as long as it maintains a suitable cause-effect relationship,

The study also has limitations. The study focused on the most relevant functions of *so* and did not explain all the functions of *so*. Moreover, the study compared the Japanese students' writings with native speakers, but the data from the corpus showed numerical results only. More precise examination would be needed.

As for instructional implications, it is hoped that writing instructions include teaching how to correctly reflect the writer's ideas in the text by connecting sentences, phrases, and clauses in a logical manner rather than discrete features of sentence structures. For future improvement, the study hopes to include student questionnaires or personal interviews to understand students' perceptions about the use of conjunctions and conjunctive adverbs in English writings.

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