Are Judgment Tasks Still Useful to Measure L2 Learners' Grammatical Competence?

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Abstract

Judgment tasks (e.g., acceptability judgment task) have long been used in SLA studies to elucidate L2 learners' knowledge or competence. However, judgment tasks have gradually been replaced with alternative methods (e.g., reaction time measurement) partly because of the concern about interference of learnt knowledge. This paper argues that despite this possibility (and possible effects of other confounding factors), data collected with judgment tasks are still useful to uncover the nature of L2, referring to the results of two studies (Hokari, 2015; Takeda, 2021), both of which report on the data that are unlikely to be elicited without judgment tasks. Based on the results of these studies, this paper also points out an important property of L2 that is not necessarily discussed in depth in SLA studies.

1　Introduction: Arguments on judgment data in linguistic studies

Since the advent of *Generative Grammar* (Chomsky, 1965), data elicited through acceptability judgments[1] have played a central role in elucidating grammatical knowledge or *competence* speakers have in their mother tongue, and thereby in delineating the nature of human language. As Chomsky (1965) convincingly argues, observing natural speech is insufficient to uncover what is possible and what is impossible in their grammars. For one thing, this is because "[a] record of natural speech will show numerous false starts, deviations from rules, changes of plan in mid-course, and so on." (*ibid.*, p. 4) In short, naturalistic data are often skewed by *performance*-related factors. For another, being a native speaker of a language means that s/he also has intuitions on what is impossible in the language. For instance, native speakers of English have tacit knowledge that (1a) is possible, albeit hard to process, whereas (1b) is degraded even though they may not be able to say why (i.e., the

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1　In this paper, the term *acceptability* is used instead of *grammaticality*. As Chomsky argues, "[a]cceptability is a concept that belongs to the study of performance, whereas grammaticalness belongs to the study of competence." (Chomsky, 1965, p. 11). That is, grammaticality can only be inferred from acceptability (Cowart, 1997; Ionin, 2012; Spinner & Gass, 2019). For this reason, I confine the use of the term (*un*)*grammatical*(*ity*) to the properties of linguistic expressions. See Spinner and Gass (2019) for the detailed discussion on these terms.

poverty-of-stimulus problem: Chomsky, 1986).

(1) a. Who did Tom believe that she met in the cafeteria.

    b. *Who did Tom believe the rumor that she met in the cafeteria.

Crucially, sentences like (1b) are not observable in actual interactions; therefore, from naturalistic data, no one can judge whether such examples are accidentally missing or whether they are not generated in the grammars of native speakers. Thus, in order to delineate native speakers' competence, judgment data on the acceptability of linguistic expressions including the ones that are predicted to be ungrammatical are necessary.

In the same vein, judgment data have been widely used in second language acquisition (SLA) studies, especially, the generative approach to SLA (*GenSLA*: Slabakova, 2016; Slabakova et al., 2020)[2]. However, interpretation of judgment data is not straightforward in SLA. This is closely related to the controversy over what knowledge is measured in judgment tasks (e.g., an acceptability judgment task; a true-false judgment task).

Unlike the acquisition of a mother tongue, the majority of second language (L2) learners begin their L2 learning with explicit instructions (e.g., a verb must precede its object in English; the particle *-wa* in Japanese marks a topic that is already introduced in the discourse). Therefore, learnt knowledge—or *explicit knowledge*—often obscures the unconscious knowledge—or *implicit knowledge*—L2 learners have. For example, consider the sentences in (2), both of which lack a required inflectional morpheme (third-person singular *-s* for 2a, and past tense *-ed* for 2b).

(2) a. *Every year, the student with long hair visit London.

    b. *Last month, the student with long hair visit London.

For most L2 learners of English, it is not so difficult to point out that the sentences in (2) are unacceptable in English and to explain why. Despite this, it is difficult to use verbal morphology

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2   Unlike studies on native speakers' competence, most of which are based on the data collected from a few native informants including the researcher, judgment data in SLA studies are usually collected from a larger number of informants with experimental methods and are analyzed quantitatively. This is primarily because variations among individual learners are large in SLA and learners' intuitions on a second language are often indeterminate (Schachter et al., 1976). This does not mean, however, that studies on native speakers' competence never use quantitative data that are collected through experiments. In fact, a growing number of studies employ experimental methods in the exploration of native speakers' competence (Cowart, 1997; Goodall, 2021; Schütze, 1996; Sprouse & Hornstein, 2013).

consistently, as found in so-called *morpheme studies* (e.g., Dulay & Burt, 1973, 1974), or to find errors in verbal morphology when L2 learners process sentences online (e.g., Wakabayashi et al., 2021; Yamazaki et al., 2021). A plausible explanation for this is that the relevant properties in the target language have not yet been incorporated into their L2 grammars as implicit knowledge, but thanks to explicit knowledge, they can judge seemingly in a target-like fashion. For this reason, in a pursuit of more reliable experimental methods that measure L2 learners' competence, judgment tasks have gradually been replaced with alternative methods such as the ones that are less likely to be interfered by explicit knowledge (see Bowles, 2011; Ellis, 2005), or psycholinguistic methods that observe uncontrollable responses like reaction time (in milliseconds), eye-movement, or brain activities (see Jegerski & VanPatten, 2014). A natural question arising here is whether judgment tasks are no longer necessary in the exploration of L2 learners' competence.

The aim of this paper does not lie in discussing what data elicitation method should be used, or how and to what extent we can reduce the interference effects from explicit knowledge in judgment tasks. Rather, this paper argues that despite the possibility of interference of explicit knowledge (and other possible effects from confounding factors), data collected with judgment tasks are still informative and sometimes seem indispensable to uncover grammatical competence L2 learners have, referring to two studies reporting the data that are unlikely to be gained without judgment tasks: Hokari (2015) and Takeda (2021).

2   Studies/data showing usefulness of judgment tasks

2.1 Hokari (2015)

It is often reported that L2 learners can detect grammatical errors in a judgment task, but they cannot when they process sentences online (see §1). Hokari (2015), however, argues that the opposite may also happen in SLA. Hokari showed this based on a series of experiments investigating preposition omission errors known as *null prepositions* (Klein, 1993) in SLA studies.

It is often found that L2 learners omit a preposition that must follow a verb (e.g., *rely on*). Although this seems attributed to a lack of target subcategorization knowledge for the verb (i.e., a lack of knowledge that the verb must take a prepositional object rather that a nominal object), Klein (1993) maintains that L2 learners may omit a preposition even when they have the target subcategorization knowledge. This is because L2 learners who can correctly exclude erroneous preposition omission in declarative sentences as in (3a) often cannot detect the omission of the very same preposition in other extraction constructions such as *wh*-questions (3b) or relative clauses (3c). Subsequent studies also found that preposition omission errors that cannot be reduced to a lack of

target subcategorization knowledge also happen in passive sentences (e.g., Hokari & Wakabayashi, 2009) and *tough* constructions (Katooka, 2022).

(3) a. The president relies {on / *φ} the employee.　　　　　　(Declarative)

　　b. Which employee does the president rely {on / *φ}?　　　(*Wh*-question)

　　c. He is the employee the president relies {on / *φ}.　　　(Relative clause)

　　d. The employee is relied {on / *φ} by the president.　　　(Passive)

　　e. The employee is easy for the president to rely {on / *φ}.　(*Tough* construction)

　　Hokari (2015) investigated the nature of null prepositions in L2, administering a series of experiments to 21 French-speaking learners of English (FLEs) and 32 Japanese-speaking learners of English (JLEs), who had comparable proficiency in English, as well as 20 native speakers of English (NSEs) as controls. Hokari conducted not only an acceptability judgment task (AJT), but an elicited imitation task (EIT), which is said to measure explicit knowledge (Bowles, 2011; Ellis, 2005), and a self-paced reading task (SPRT), a psycholinguistic method that measures reaction time (in milliseconds) spent reading sentences.

　　In the (paper-and-pencil) AJT, exemplified in Figure 1, a target sentence (i.e., a sentence intentionally missing a required preposition) along with context were presented to participants. The participants were asked to judge whether the target sentence is acceptable in English, using a five-point scale: −2 (*Unacceptable*); −1 (*Maybe unacceptable*); 0 (*I don't know*); +1 (*Maybe acceptable*); +2 (*Acceptable*). When they rated the sentence −2 or −1, they were also asked to correct the part they thought unacceptable.
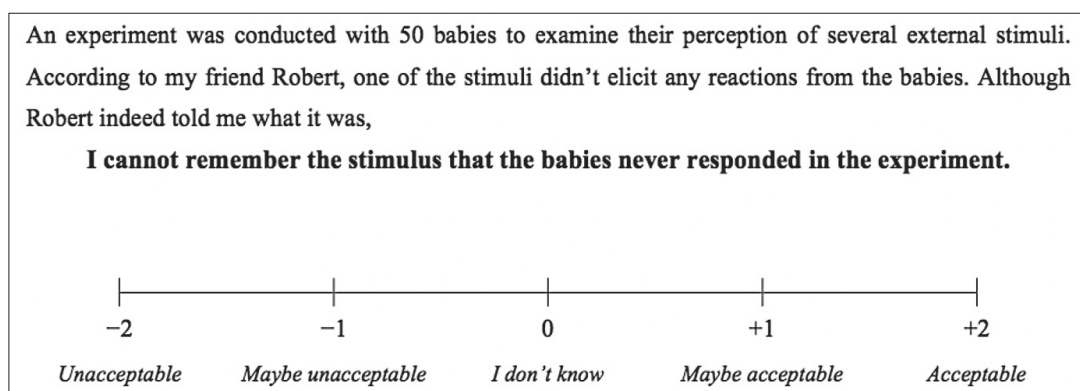

Figure 1 Example of the AJT (Hokari, 2015, p. 169)

The EIT (i.e., a task that asks participants to repeat a stimulus orally after hearing it) was conducted with a Keynote slideshow. In each trial, participants were first asked to play and listen to a pre-recorded audio file of a target stimulus (i.e., a sentence with a target preposition) uttered by a male native speaker of English (Step 1 in Figure 2). After three seconds, an instruction asking participants to repeat the sentence they have just heard appeared on the screen (Step 2). Participants started repeating the stimulus after hearing a signal (one-second beep) indicating the beginning of a trial (Step 3)[3].
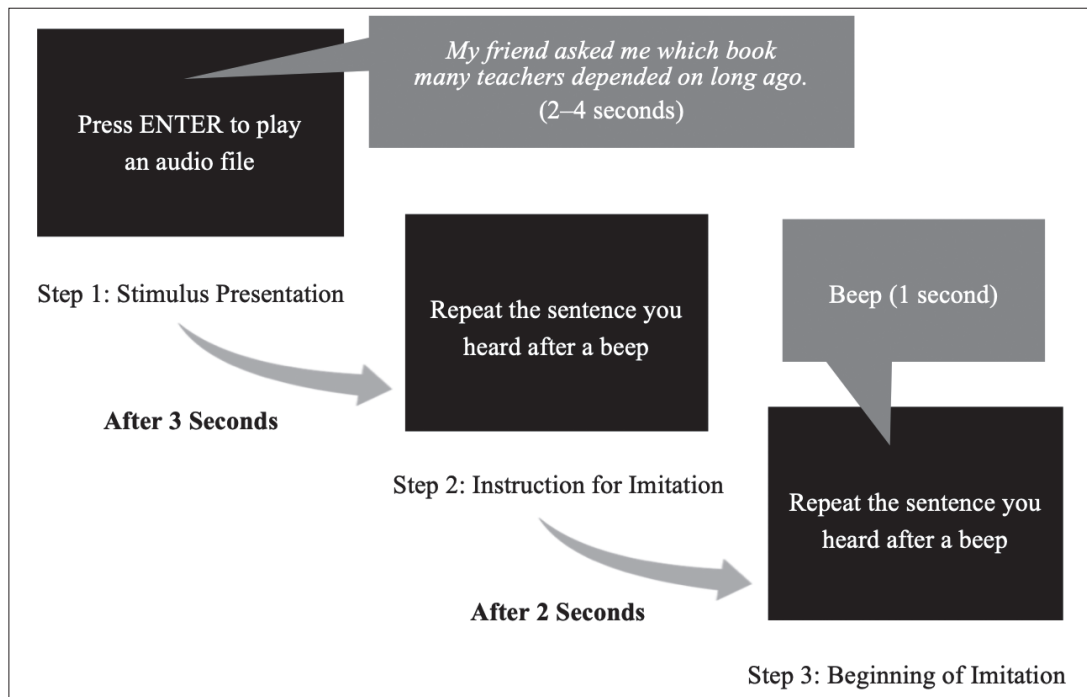

Figure 2 Procedure of the EIT (Hokari, 2015, p. 185)

The last task in Hokari (2015) was an SPRT that compared the time participants spent reading the part where the lack of a required preposition is revealed in an ungrammatical sentence (e.g., the

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3　The assumption underlying this task is that "if the subject's grammar corresponds to the grammar used in producing the string, the imitation is more likely to be accurate" (Bley-Vroman & Chaudron, 1994, p. 245) and "[s]pecific inaccuracies may point to specific differences between the subject's grammar and the grammar of the target string." (*ibid.*) Thus, this task is widely used to measure implicit knowledge L2 learners have (Bowles, 2011; Ellis, 2005; among many others) although the procedures and stimuli must be designed carefully to exclude the possibility of rote repetition. For example, the stimuli participants repeat must be long enough to exceed their working memory capacity (Erlam, 2006). Also, the timing of repeating a stimulus should be delayed to make rote repetition difficult (McDade et al., 1982).

underlined word in 4b) and the time they spent reading the very same word in the grammatical counterpart (e.g., the underlined word in 4a). By doing so, Hokari examined whether L2 learners are sensitive to missing prepositions.

(4) a. The letter that the customer never responded to <u>turned</u> out to be important.

　　b. *The letter that the customer never responded <u>turned</u> out to be important.

The SPRT was conducted with DMDX (Forster & Forster, 2003), a software package for reaction time experiments, and a gamepad as an input device. Each stimulus was presented in a noncumulative word-by-word moving-window style (Just et al., 1982), such that each button-push revealed just one word from the beginning of the sentence, as in (5) (Hokari, 2015, p. 192).

(5)　a. --- ------ ---- --- -------- ----- --------- ------ --- -- -- ---------.　(button-push) →

　　b. The ------ ---- --- -------- ----- --------- ------ --- -- -- ---------.　(button-push) →

　　c. --- letter ---- --- -------- ----- --------- ------ --- -- -- ---------.　(button-push) →

　　d. --- ------ that --- -------- ----- --------- ------ --- -- -- ---------.　(button-push) →

　　e. --- ------ ---- the -------- ----- --------- ------ --- -- -- ---------.　(button-push) →

　　f. --- ------ ---- --- customer ----- --------- ------ --- -- -- ---------.　(button-push) →

　　g. --- ------ ---- --- -------- never --------- ------ --- -- -- ---------.　(button-push) →

　　h. --- ------ ---- --- -------- ----- responded ------ --- -- -- ---------.　(button-push) →

　　i. --- ------ ---- --- -------- ----- --------- turned --- -- -- ---------.　(button-push) →

　　j. --- ------ ---- --- -------- ----- --------- ------ out -- -- ---------.　(button-push) →

　　k. --- ------ ---- --- -------- ----- --------- ------ --- to -- ---------.　(button-push) →

　　l. --- ------ ---- --- -------- ----- --------- ------ --- -- be ---------.　(button-push) →

　　m.--- ------ ---- --- -------- ----- --------- ------ --- -- -- important.

Employing these three tasks, Hokari (2015) tested null prepositions in three different extraction constructions; *wh*-questions (e.g., 3b), relative clauses (e.g., 3c), and passives (e.g., 3d)[4]. Due to

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4　Hokari (2015) confirmed that participants had target subcategorization knowledge for verbs used in these three tasks (e.g., *respond*) with a written translation task. In this task, participants were asked to translate a declarative sentence written in their mother tongue (i.e., French for FLEs; Japanese for JLEs) using prompts. (i) gives an example of the test items presented to FLEs.

　(i) Stimulus: Certains de mes amis n'ont pas répondu à ma lettre.

limitations of space, the discussion that follows focuses on the results of relative clauses summarized in Table 1. The columns labeled "AJT" and "EIT" show the acceptance rate of null prepositions and the production rate of relative clauses without required prepositions, respectively. The column "SPRT" indicates whether participants exhibited sensitivity to a lack of prepositions (i.e., whether they exhibited statistically significant delay in reading time measured in milliseconds when they process relative clauses without prepositions in comparison to those with prepositions).

Table 1 Null prepositions in relative clauses (Hokari, 2015, p. 222, p. 255, & p. 271)

Group	AJT	EIT	SPRT
NSE	9%	0%	Sensitive
FLE	66%	6%	Sensitive
JLE	60%	27%	Sensitive

For NSEs, null prepositions were not found in any of the tasks, which means that null prepositions are not permitted in their grammars. L2 learners, on the other hand, responded differently depending on the tasks: although they did not produce null prepositions so frequently (EIT) and showed sensitivity to a lack of required prepositions (SPRT), they did accept null prepositions (AJT)[5].

These results seem counterintuitive because L2 learners responded in a target-like way in the tasks that are said to measure implicit knowledge (EIT) and the reaction time that is hard to control consciously (SPRT) whereas they failed to do so in the task that enables them to rely on explicit knowledge (AJT). How should we interpret these results? What do these results tell us about L2 learners' competence?

A crucial difference between the EIT/SPRT and the AJT lies in time available for backtracking. It is argued that time L2 learners can spend backtracking enables them to revise a non-target representation that they initially hypothesized to the target one by using explicit knowledge (e.g.,

Prompts: respond, some, letter
Expected answer: Some of my friends did not respond to my letter.   (Hokari, 2015, p. 159)

As in (i), a target verb (e.g., *respond*) was always included in the prompts, but a target preposition (e.g., *to*) was not. Thus, participants had to supply the target preposition on their own; thereby, their subcategorization knowledge was measured.

5   Hokari (2015) reports that the same results were found for *wh*-questions (i.e., null prepositions were found only in the AJT) although L2 learners responded differently to null prepositions in passives. See Hokari (2015, 2018) for details.

Bowles, 2011; Ellis, 2005). This is intuitively and empirically correct, as found in the studies on inflectional morphology discussed in §1. However, the data in Hokari (2015) suggest that the opposite may also happen depending on target properties. That is, time available for backtracking also allows L2 learners to cancel the target representation they initially hypothesized and instead to retrieve a non-target representation that appears consistent with an ungrammatical expression they are parsing. This seems the reason why null prepositions were attested only in the (untimed) AJT[6].

The data in Hokari (2015) have at least two non-trivial implications for data collection in SLA. First, the untimed AJT does not exclusively measure explicit knowledge. Whatever the non-target representation L2 learners employ to parse preposition omission is[7], it is unlikely to result from explicitly learnt knowledge because instructions such as "prepositions must be omitted in extraction constructions like relative clauses but not in declaratives" exist in neither textbooks nor classrooms. Rather, this is more likely as a result that L2 learners manage to parse and comprehend an ungrammatical linguistic form, making use of representations or grammatical operations that are available at their current stage of L2 development.

Second, without judgment tasks, we may draw an erroneous conclusion as to L2 learners' competence. For example, as far as the results of the EIT and the SPRT in Hokari (2015) are concerned, it can be concluded that their L2 grammars never tolerate preposition omission in relative clauses; however, this conclusion is indeed incorrect as found in the AJT. In this way, without judgment tasks, we may overlook an important characteristic of their competence: multiple competing representations may co-exist in their grammars although some of these may not be observed due to task effects.

2.2 Takeda (2021)

Takeda (2021) also reports intriguing data that are hard to elicit in other tasks than judgments. Takeda investigated how L2 learners interpret structures that they deem acceptable but are in fact ungrammatical, based on so-called *indirect passives* (Howard & Niyekawa-Howard, 1976), which are grammatical and quite common in Japanese but are ungrammatical in English.

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6   It should be noted that the same thing seems to happen to a lesser extent even among NSEs. Comparing the results of timed and untimed AJTs administered to 20 NSEs, Radford et al. (2012) found that preposition omission in relative clauses was not accepted in the timed AJT, but its acceptability increased in the untimed AJT. This shows that time available for backtracking allows not only L2 learners but also native speakers to make use of a (non-target) representation that is otherwise unavailable.

7   In line with Radford et al. (2012) and Klein (2001), Hokari (2015) argues that movement of the covert preposition is the source of null prepositions in relative clauses in L2 English.

Both Japanese and English allow *direct passives* (Howard & Niyekawa-Howard, 1976) that describe the same propositional contents as their active counterparts. The examples of a Japanese direct passive and its equivalent in English are given in (6b) and (7b), respectively.

(6) a. Zyûgyôin-ga   syatyô-o   hihansi-ta.   (Active)
       employee-nom   president-acc   criticize-past[8]

    b. Syatyô-ga   zyûgyôin-ni   hihans-are-ta.   (Direct passive)
       president-nom   employee-by   criticize-pass.-past

(7) a. The employee criticized the president.   (Active)

    b. The president was criticized by the employee.   (Direct passive)

In addition to direct passives, Japanese allows indirect passives as in (8a) and (8b). English does not allow indirect passives, as the ungrammaticality of (9a) and (9b) shows.

(8) a. Syatyô-ga   zyûgyôin-ni   zigyôkeikaku-o   hihans-are-ta.
       president-nom   employee-by   business plan-acc   criticize-pass.-past

    b. Watasi-wa   musuko-ni   nak-are-ta.
       I-top   (my) son-by   cry-pass.-past

(9) a. *The president was criticized the business plan by the employee.

    b. *I was cried by my son.

Previous studies found that JLEs accept or produce ungrammatical passives like (9a) and (9b) (e.g., Izumi & Lakshmanan, 1998; Inagaki et al., 2009). Moreover, it is also found that the very same errors occur among Korean-speaking learners of English, whose L1 partially allows indirect passives (Hokari & Kimura, 2019), although such errors never arise among FLEs, whose L1 disallows indirect passives (Hokari, 2016). Given these findings, it seems reasonable to conclude that L2 learners' acceptance/production of ungrammatical indirect passives in L2 English is attributable to the interference effects from indirect passives that are grammatical in their L1.

Takeda (2021), however, points out that there is another possibility. In addition to indirect passives, Japanese also allows *causative passives* as in (10).

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8   Abbreviations used in Japanese examples are as follows: acc = accusative case marker; cause = causative morpheme; nom = nominative case marker; pass. = passive morpheme; past = past tense morpheme; top = topic marker.

(10) Watasi-wa　　　　　musuko-ni　　　　nak-**as**-are-ta.

　　 I-top　　　　　　　(my) son-by　　　cry-**cause**-pass.-past

　　 'I was made to cry by my son.'

　　Seemingly, the causative passive (10) is similar to the indirect passive (8b); however, these two sentences have completely different propositions. The indirect passive (8b) describes the event where *watasi* 'I' was indirectly/adversatively affected by his/her son's crying. Thus, *watasi* 'I' is the experiencer (in the sense that the person was affected psychologically by the event that happened independently of his/her involvement) whereas *musuko* 'son' is the agent (i.e., the doer of the action depicted by the verb). The causative passive (10), on the other hand, describes the event in which *my son* (= *musuko*) caused *I* (= *watasi*) to *cry* (= *naku*). Therefore, *watasi* 'I' is the agent while *musuko* 'son' is the causer (i.e., a person who caused the event). Given this, it is possible that JLEs' acceptance of ungrammatical passives like (9) is also due to the effects of causative passives, unlike the claim in previous studies (Hokari, 2016; Hokari & Kimura, 2019; Inagaki et al., 2009; Izumi & Lakshmanan, 1998).

　　Takeda (2021) tested this possibility, administering an AJT with a follow-up forced-choice judgment task as in Figure 3 to 21 JLEs (Elementary: *n* = 12; Intermediate: *n* = 9). In each trial, participants were first asked to judge whether the sentence presented to them is acceptable in English, using the five choices (i.e., the acceptability judgment task in Figure 3). When they rated the sentence *Don't know / unable to judge* (= わからない・判断できない), *Maybe incorrect* (= おそらく誤りである), or *Incorrect* (= 誤りである), they went on to the next question. When they rated the sentence
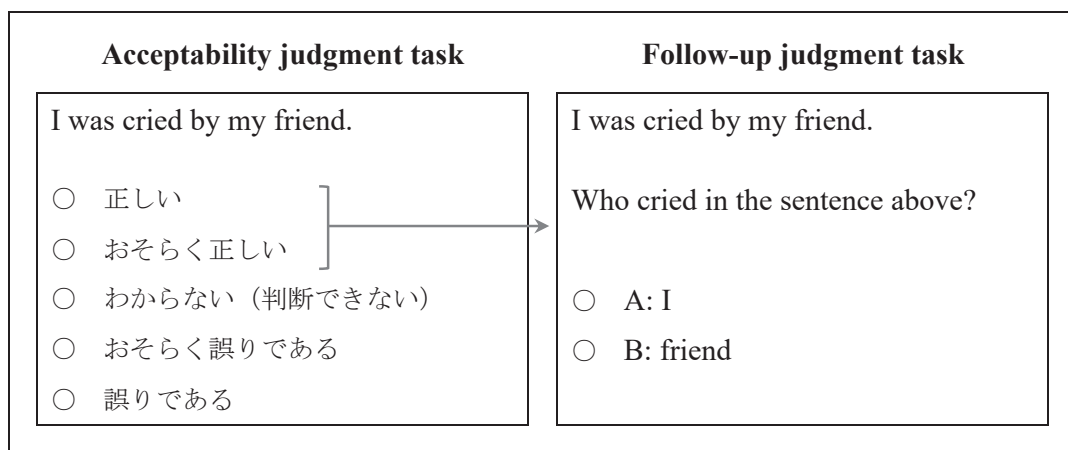

Figure 3　Procedure of the AJT using Google Forms (Takeda, 2021, p. 27 & p. 46)

Correct (= 正しい) or *Maybe correct* (= おそらく正しい), a follow-up question appeared that asks them to choose the doer (i.e., the agent) of the action depicted by the verb (i.e., the follow-up judgment task in Figure 3).

As discussed above, the agent of the event differs between Japanese indirect passives and Japanese causative passives. When a participant chooses A in the follow-up question, the participant is likely to interpret the ungrammatical English passive as the one that is equivalent to the Japanese causative passive, where the subject of the sentence is the agent of the action depicted by the verb. Conversely, when a participant chooses B, s/he is likely to view the ungrammatical English passive as an equivalent to the Japanese indirect passive, where the noun phrase following the preposition *by* is the agent. Using this method, Takeda (2021) tested JLEs' interpretation of ungrammatical English passives. Table 2 summarizes the results of the acceptability judgment part.

Table 2 Results of the acceptability judgment part (Takeda, 2021, p. 29)

Responses		Elementary (*n* = 12)	Intermediate (*n* = 9)
Total		192	144
Acceptance of ungrammatical passives	*N*	78	72
	%	41%	50%

As can be seen in Table 2, both groups accepted nearly half of ungrammatical English passives although the acceptance rate seemed slightly higher for the intermediate group. As far as the acceptability judgments are concerned, there seems no striking difference between the two groups; however, the results of the follow-up judgment task that are given in Figure 4 revealed that what happens in learner grammars indeed differs between the two groups.

As shown in Figure 4, there was a striking difference between the two groups in interpretation of the ungrammatical English passives they judged acceptable. For the elementary group, the two different interpretations seem to compete although the indirect passive interpretation outnumbered the causative passive interpretation. However, for the intermediate group, the causative passive interpretation was predominant. In short, confirming Takeda's (2021) hypothesis, the results revealed the existence of two different sources of errors that change as L2 learners become proficient in L2 English: the effects of Japanese indirect passives as well as causative passives for elementary JLEs and the influences of Japanese causative passives for intermediate JLEs[9].

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9   Interestingly, Takeda (2021) reports that L2 learners' interpretation of ungrammatical passives also depends on transitivity of verbs. Specifically, L2 learners are more likely to interpret ungrammatical passives with transitive
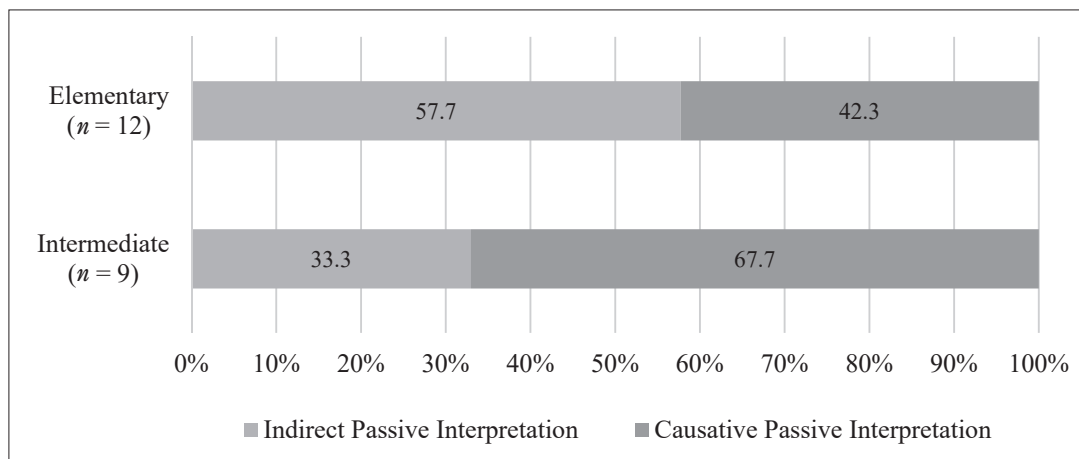
Figure 4 JLEs' interpretation of ungrammatical passives (Takeda, 2021, p. 29)

Beyond the property she investigated (i.e., acceptance of ungrammatical English passives), the data reported in Takeda (2021) seem to suggest important characteristics of L2 learners' competence we might not notice without judgment tasks. To begin with, Takeda's study demonstrates that more than one independent cause may result in seemingly indistinguishable errors, and the cause of the very same errors may change as L2 learners become proficient in L2. It seems difficult to notice these facts just by observing their production or processing. Hence, to detect the exact source of errors at their current stage of L2 development, judgment tasks that are carefully designed like the one in Takeda (e.g., an AJT combined with a follow-up judgment task) are still useful.

Furthermore, the results in Takeda (2021) also lend credence to the claim in §2.1 that certain errors in SLA are the outcome of L2 learners' attempt to parse/comprehend (ungrammatical) linguistic expressions by making use of representations or grammatical operations that are available at the current state of their grammars. Presumably, the result whereby JLEs interpreted ungrammatical English passives differently depending on their proficiency in English can also be explained from this perspective. Upon encountering ungrammatical English passives like *I was cried by my friend*, JLEs initially hypothesize that the structure of this kind of passives seems consistent with that of Japanese indirect passives. Based on this hypothesis, they transfer Japanese indirect passives to the English passives, which makes the ungrammatical passives acceptable in their L2 grammars. At some point in the development of L2, however, they notice that the initial hypothesis is

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verbs (e.g., *She was taken photos by her friend*) as the equivalents to Japanese indirect passives whereas they tended to interpret those with intransitives (e.g., *I was cried by my friend*) as the equivalents to Japanese causative passives. See Takeda and Hokari (2023) for detailed discussion as well as additional data.

wrong for some reason, and gradually cease thinking of ungrammatical English passives as the equivalents to Japanese indirect passives (Hokari, 2016; Inagaki et al., 2009). Although they become reluctant to transfer Japanese indirect passives, they still try to parse the ungrammatical passives, making use of representations/grammatical operations available in their grammars, and manage to find an alternative structure that appears consistent with the ungrammatical passives, i.e., Japanese causative passives. As a result, they start to transfer Japanese causative passives instead of indirect passives, which makes the ungrammatical English passives still acceptable in their grammars (see Takeda & Hokari, 2023 for further details)[10]. In this way, judgment tasks still have potential for revealing L2 learners' competence.

3   Conclusion

This paper discussed whether judgment data/tasks are still useful to elucidate grammatical competence L2 learners have, introducing intriguing data from two existing studies: Hokari (2015) and Takeda (2021). These studies shed light on the behavior of L2 learners that is not necessarily discussed in depth in SLA studies:

- L2 learners may accept errors they do not produce as grammatical and may accept errors they can respond to unconsciously (Hokari, 2015).
- Different causes may result in seemingly indistinguishable errors (Takeda, 2021).

These findings seem to suggest an important property of L2 that is hard to notice without judgment tasks:

- It is possible that L2 learners parse ungrammatical linguistic expressions making the best use of representations/grammatical operations that are available at their current stage of L2 development.

In this way, even if judgment tasks are subject to the effects from several confounding factors (e.g., interference from explicit knowledge), judgment tasks are still useful, telling us a lot about L2 learners' grammars/competence.

Last but not least, this conclusion does not mean that the other experimental methods are of no

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10   Clearly, influences from Japanese indirect passives and causative passives are never due to explicit instructions.

use. Different data elicitation methods have their own strengths and weaknesses. Hence, what is needed in SLA studies is to choose and combine appropriate data elicitation methods to uncover the nature of L2.

Acknowledgments

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