

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ACTFL GUIDELINES FOR JAPANESE FROM A LEARNABILITY PERSPECTIVE

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I. INTRODUCTION

The assessment of learner achievement is one of the indispensable elements in language program curriculum development and syllabi construction. Without accurate needs analysis and proper assessment feeding into each other, a program could not only lack efficiency but also lose the dynamism to develop and grow. Now that certain level of oral communication is one of the goals in many of the language programs, including the Japanese program at IUJ, a reliable measure of assessing learners' oral performance is called for. Unlike discreet grammar point testing, however, assessment of communicative competence has largely depended on the tester's intuition. Unique in this respect is the Oral Proficiency Testing conducted by the American Council for Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). ACTFL has developed a training program for their "testers" to assess language learners' communicative competence by one on one interviews. After the initial training period, what helps the testers maintain a certain standard of assessment is called the ACTFL Guidelines (see Appendix for the 1985 Draft for assessing learners' oral proficiency of Japanese).

The choice and the ordering of the items in the Guidelines being crucial for the assessment, they need to be supported and justified by solid evidence. How can we obtain such evidence? One concept which can provide insight is that of learnability; what exactly is learnable at a certain stage of language development, and why? The issue of learnability concerns various aspects of language acquisition as evident by the varieties of approaches made by researchers (Clahsen, 1980; Long, 1983). However, in the particularly relevant areas of curriculum development and syllabi construction, it is not enjoying the recognition it deserves. While the concept of learner-centeredness has slowly penetrated into the field of methodologies, the main concern of program orientation lies in what to teach, be it notional, grammatical or any other type of syllabus, while the ordering of the contents remains largely arbitrary. Oral Proficiency Testing has been criticized precisely on this point, that their acquisitional stages and even the "guidelines" of the Interview seem arbitrary and lack solid ground. Byrnes (1987) does, however, expresses her interest in investigating the comparability of their Proficiency scale and Pinemann's (1984) acquisitional stages.

In the present paper, the accuracy component of the ACTFL Guidelines will be compared with learners' speech data focusing on the development of morphology. It should be noted that such choice does not reflect the author's intent that teaching discreet grammar points should be

the only basis of curricula or syllabi, let alone that of the Proficiency Guidelines (see Higgs and Clifford [1982] and Long cited in Byrnes, [1987]). Obviously, grammatical attainment comprises only a part of one's such ability. More importantly, discrete grammar points can only be logically utilized as measuring sticks of one's language attainment when they are justified that they belong to certain acquisitional stages. Otherwise the guidelines can easily mislead the judgement of the testers, since such grammatical elements can be more salient or easier to pinpoint than other possible judgmental factors such as sociolinguistic and discourse functional manageability of a testee.

II. THE STUDY

The speech data in this study were obtained at the Center for Second Language Classroom Research at University of Hawai'i at Manoa¹). Twenty-three students (all native English speakers) taking Japanese at University of Hawai'i at Manoa (9 first year, 6 second year, and 8 fourth year students) took a repetition test of Japanese. In a language lab, they listened to 40 tape-recorded sentences recorded by a female native Japanese speaker. No notetaking was allowed. As soon as a sentence was read twice, the students attempted to repeat it as accurately as they could, and their performance was recorded. The students were not informed of what the results were for, but they knew that the results had no influence on their course grades. The sentences were controlled so that they included various particles, verb forms, forms of negation, and word order (See Tables 1-1 & 1-2).

Now, let's take a closer look at the nature of repetition tests in general, and the factors considered to create the tests used in this study. Repetition tests have been found to be considerably reliable measures of language attainment shown by high correlation with other language tests (See review in Potter, 1984, especially Naiman, 1974; Slobin and Welsh 1967). A factor to consider in examining the results of a repetition test is the problem of short-term memory. It has been observed that the relative ease of memorizing a sentence verbatim is, in the order of ease, initial, final, and finally the mid portion of a given sentence. Also, it is known that human short-term memory for verbatim recall seems to be limited to seven plus or minus two syllables. In order to take these findings into consideration, each test sentence was separated into three sections by counting seven short syllables from the beginning and the end of the sentence. For example:

(initial)	(mid)	(final)
"Keeko wa nijuuissai	de ginkoo de	hataraitte imasu."
1 2 3 4 5 6 7		1 2 3 4 5 6 7

'Keeko is twenty-one years old and works at a bank.'

Notice that morae and overlong syllables (Vance, 1987) were not considered. This was because some of the students were expected not to have acquired such rhythm of Japanese yet. In such a case it seemed natural that the students would depend on the familiar English syllable count in storing the

TABLE 1-1
MORPHOLOGICAL AND SYNTACTIC FEATURES INVOLVED
IN THE REPETITION TEST

*The items considered in the present paper. Other items were excluded on the basis of the limited number of appearance (less than three obligatory contexts). This paper restricts its concern to particles and verb forms.

PARTICLES

* <i>wa</i> topic	<i>dewa</i>
* <i>wa</i> contrast	<i>demo</i>
* <i>wa</i> emphasis	WH + <i>demo</i>
* <i>mo</i> 'also'	<i>node</i>
WH + <i>mo</i> 'nani mo'	<i>made ni</i>
* <i>ga</i> subject	<i>made wa</i>
<i>ga</i> object	<i>ne</i>
* <i>ga</i> 'but'	* <i>yo</i>
* <i>o</i> object	<i>ka</i>
* <i>e</i> directional	<i>no</i>
<i>ni</i> agentive	* <i>no</i> embedded subject
* <i>ni</i> locational	* <i>no</i> possessive
<i>ni</i> time	<i>ni wa</i>
<i>de</i> locational	
* <i>de</i> instrumental	
<i>de</i> temporal	
<i>to</i> 'with'	
* <i>to</i> temporal	
* <i>to</i> quotative	
<i>kara</i> directional/ temporal	
<i>made</i> directional/ temporal	
* <i>kara</i> causal	
<i>ka</i> 'or'	
<i>ka</i> question	
<i>ka</i> embedded question	
*WH + <i>ka</i>	

VERB FORMS

*copula	<i>-desu/da</i>
*non-past	<i>-masu/ru</i>
*past	<i>-ta</i>
desiderative	<i>-tai</i>
*progressive	<i>-teiru/teita</i>
*animate/inanimate	<i>-aru/iru</i>
perfectivised adj.	<i>-katta</i>
gerund + aux.	<i>-te iku/ kuru</i> <i>shimau/oku</i>
conditional	<i>-tara</i>
*benefactive	<i>-morau/ kureru</i> <i>/ageru</i>
*intensive	<i>-oo</i>
*provisional	<i>-eba</i>
passive	<i>-rareru</i>
*representative	<i>-tari</i>
*- <i>ni naru/suru</i>	
causative	<i>-saseru</i>
*honorifics	<i>-irassharu</i>
	<i>-o + Vstem + ni naru</i>
*no politeness marking in sub-clause	<i>*Shitte imasu hito ni</i> <i>michi o kiku.</i>
tense marking in sub-clause	<i>Shitte ita hito ni</i> <i>michi o kiku.</i>

TABLE 1-2 (continued)

NEGATIVE

formulae *-nebanarānai*
 NP + neg. *-ja arimasen*
 V + neg. *-masen*
 Adj. + neg. *-ku arimasen*
 Double neg.
 Adv. + neg. *-mettani ...nai*
 Neg. + *zu*
mada/moo

WORD ORDER

formulae *-soo desunee*
 topicalization
 intonational question
 sentence inversion
 WH/Adv. floating into non-S position (salient position)
 Adv. floating into non-S position (non-salient position)
 If clause
 canonical SOV
 SV
 OV
 S + NP + copula
 NP + copula
 conjunctions *-shi, -te*

OTHERS

noun head modifiers
 Subject extract
 noun-S-extract
 semantically opaque head

COMPLIMENTIZER

koto/no

given information. Thus, the word "Keeko" was counted to have two, not three, syllables.

The particles and the verb forms concerned appeared in various places of a sentence, but those that appeared less than three incidents overall were excluded from the analysis. The total number of instances of the obligatory contexts (the number of tokens in a given section times the number of subjects for each level), actual number of the correct tokens, and the percentage repeated correctly for each thirds of sentences were tallied and are shown in Tables 2 and 3. When an item extended from one section of a sentence to the next, it was counted to be in the latter section. (This was important especially in counting instances of word order repetition, the analysis of which is not included in the present paper.)

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

It is expected that the burden on short-term memory is greater for lower level learners, since they have less structured interlanguage grammar to depend on upon processing and storing a sentence. Thus, it was expected that the effect of short-term memory in terms of the discrepancy in the results among the three sections of a sentence should be most pronounced in the first year group, and least so in the fourth year group. Thus, hypothesis one was generated as follows:

Hypothesis 1: The result discrepancy among the three sections becomes smaller as the levels increase.

It has been reported that learners show certain orders in acquiring a target language morphology and syntax (Pienemann, 1984; Johnston, 1984). The cross-sectional result then, should show that within the diachronic language development among the three different levels, there are some morphological elements that do not show the similar developmental pattern.

Hypothesis 2: The higher level learners are generally more successful in the repeating task than the lower learners, but different items show varying degree of success.

IV. RESULTS

Figures 1, 2 and 3 show the results of particle repetition of the three sections in each level respectively (See Tables 2 and 3 for the raw figures). The fine dotted lines represent where lack of obligatory context intervenes, which may obscure the results. Therefore, in comparing the sections it should be remembered that the actual values obtained are the points that such lines connect. Figures 4, 5 and 6 show the results of verb form repetition in the same manner. Compare the results of each section across levels. The similarity of the patterns between figures 1 and 4, 2 and 5, and 3 and 6 respectively is visually very striking. For the first year students (henceforth J1) the ease of repeating the first section of a sentence is rather pronounced (see Figure 1), and the difference between the other two sections is comparatively obscure. For the second year students (henceforth

TABLE 2 PARTICLES

ob. = total tokens of obligatory context
 # = actual tokens correctly repeated

Sec- tions	items/meanings	J1			J2			J4			TOTAL		
		ob.	#	%	ob.	#	%	ob.	#	%	ob.	#	%
I N I T I A L	wa topic	153	130	85.0	102	87	85.3	136	128	94.1	391	345	88.2
	wa contrast	9	8	88.9	6	5	83.3	8	8	100	23	21	91.3
	mo also	36	23	63.9	24	11	45.8	32	30	93.8	92	64	69.6
	ga subject	9	5	11.1	6	4	66.7	8	5	62.5	23	14	60.9
	o object	45	21	46.7	30	20	66.7	40	39	97.5	115	80	69.6
	e directional	9	4	44.4	6	5	83.3	8	8	100	23	17	73.9
	ni locational	18	10	55.6	12	2	16.7	16	13	81.3	46	25	54.3
	ni directional	18	15	83.3	12	7	58.3	16	15	93.8	46	37	80.4
	to temporal	18	8	44.4	12	6	50.0	16	14	87.5	46	28	60.9
	no embedded sub	9	4	44.4	6	3	50.0	8	8	100	23	15	65.2
	no possessive	27	18	66.7	18	10	55.6	24	24	100	69	52	75.3
	TOTAL	351	246	70.1	234	160	68.4	312	292	93.6	897	698	77.8
M I D D L E	wa topic	72	23	31.9	48	28	58.3	64	58	90.6	184	109	59.2
	wa contrast	27	3	11.1	18	5	27.8	24	19	79.2	69	27	39.1
	wa emphasis	9	6	66.7	6	2	33.3	8	4	50.0	23	12	52.1
	mo also	9	1	11.1	6	0	0	8	4	50.0	23	11	47.8
	ga subject	45	7	15.6	30	16	53.3	40	36	90.0	115	73	63.5
	ga but	45	15	33.3	30	17	56.7	40	40	100	115	72	62.6
	o object	45	6	13.3	30	12	40.0	40	36	100	115	54	47.0
	e directional	18	4	22.2	12	9	75.0	16	12	75.0	39	25	64.1
	ni locational	18	4	22.2	12	0	0	16	12	75.0	30	16	53.3
	ni directional	72	22	30.6	48	18	37.5	64	46	71.9	184	86	46.7
	de instrumental	27	9	33.3	18	10	55.6	24	22	91.7	69	41	59.4
	o temporal	9	1	11.1	6	2	33.3	8	6	75.0	23	9	39.1
	to quotative	54	2	3.7	36	9	25.0	48	48	100	138	59	42.8
	kara causal	18	3	16.7	12	6	50.0	16	16	100	46	25	54.3
	ka wh+ka	27	3	11.1	18	3	16.7	24	20	83.3	69	26	37.7
	no embedded sub	18	0	0	12	0	0	16	14	87.5	46	14	30.4
	o possessive	18	0	0	12	4	33.3	16	13	81.3	46	17	40.0
	yo	18	0	0	12	0	0	16	11	68.8	46	11	23.9
	TOTAL	549	109	19.9	366	141	38.5	488	417	85.5	1403	667	47.5
F I N A L	wa topic	36	6	16.7	24	5	20.8	32	22	68.8	92	33	35.9
	wa contrast	9	0	0	6	0	0	8	8	100	23	8	34.8
	wa emphasis	18	1	5.6	12	2	16.7	16	10	62.5	46	13	28.3
	mo also	9	1	11.1	6	1	16.7	8	2	25.0	23	4	17.4
	ga subject	18	1	5.6	12	2	16.7	16	14	87.5	46	17	37.0
	o object	18	3	16.7	12	3	25.0	16	16	100	46	22	47.8
	ni directional	27	1	3.7	18	2	11.1	24	16	66.7	69	19	27.5
	to quotative	27	2	7.4	18	11	61.1	24	22	91.7	69	35	50.7
	kara causal	9	0	0	6	0	0	8	5	62.5	23	5	21.7
	yo	9	0	0	6	0	16.7	8	7	87.5	23	7	30.4
	TOTAL	180	15	8.3	114	27	23.7	160	122	76.3	454	164	36.1
	GRAND TOTAL	1080	370	34.3	714	328	45.9	960	831	86.6	2754	1529	55.5

TABLE 3 VERB FORMS

ob. = total tokens of obligatory context
 # = actual tokens of correct repetition

Sec Items	items/meanings	J1			J2			J4			TOTAL		
		ob.	#	%	ob.	#	%	ob.	#	%	ob.	#	%
I N I T I A L	copula -desu/da	9	8	88.9	6	6	100	8	8	100	23	22	95.7
	non-past -masu/ru	9	6	66.7	6	5	83.3	8	8	100	23	20	87.0
	past -ta	9	6	66.7	6	6	100	8	8	100	23	20	87.0
	animate-inanima- te -aru/iru	9	2	22.2	6	0	0	8	7	87.5	23	9	39.1
	intensive -oo	9	4	44.4	6	4	66.7	8	8	100	23	16	69.6
	no politeness- marking in sub- clause	18	4	22.2	12	7	58.3	16	15	93.8	40	26	65.0
	TOTAL	63	30	47.6	42	28	66.7	56	54	96.4	161	113	70.2
M I D D L E	copula -desu/da	9	8	88.9	16	10	62.5	8	8	100	33	26	78.8
	non-past -masu/ru	45	14	31.1	30	12	40.0	40	37	92.5	115	63	54.8
	past -ta	63	10	15.9	42	18	42.9	56	51	91.1	161	79	49.1
	progressive -teiru/teita	9	3	33.3	6	5	83.3	8	4	50.0	23	12	52.2
	animate-inanima- te -aru/iru	27	11	40.7	18	4	22.2	24	20	83.3	69	35	50.7
	benefactive -morau/-kureru/ageru	27	0	0	18	2	11.1	24	21	87.5	69	23	33.3
	provisional -eba	18	3	16.7	12	5	41.7	16	14	87.5	46	22	47.8
	representative -tari	18	3	16.7	12	11	91.7	16	15	93.8	46	29	63.0
	-ninaru/suru	9	0	0	6	0	0	8	7	87.5	23	7	30.4
	honorifics ²	27	2	7.4	18	2	11.1	24	19	79.2	69	23	33.3
	no politeness marking in sub- clause	117	12	10.7	78	27	34.6	104	95	91.3	299	134	44.8
	TOTAL	369	66	17.9	246	96	39.0	328	291	88.7	943	453	48.0
F I N A L	copula -desu/da	63	12	19.0	42	18	42.9	56	54	96.4	161	84	52.2
	non-past -masu/ru	90	22	24.4	60	32	53.3	80	73	91.3	230	127	55.2
	past -ta	189	42	22.2	126	69	54.8	168	163	97.0	483	274	56.7
	progressive -teiru/teita	45	14	31.1	30	12	40.0	40	37	92.5	115	63	54.8
	animate-inani- mate -aru/iru	27	4	14.9	18	5	27.8	24	21	87.5	69	30	43.5
	benefactive -morau/kureru/ageru	9	0	0	6	0	0	8	6	75.0	23	6	26.1
	intensive -oo	27	6	22.2	18	3	16.7	24	24	100	69	31	45.0
	provisional -eba	9	1	11.1	6	5	83.3	8	8	100	23	14	60.9
	representative -tari	9	1	11.1	6	1	16.7	8	5	62.5	23	7	30.4
	-ninaru/suru	36	0	0	24	5	20.8	32	30	93.8	92	35	38.0
	no politeness marking in sub- clause	18	0	0	12	4	33.3	16	15	93.8	46	19	41.3
	-garu, -rashii, -tsumori	27	0	0	18	12	66.7	24	23	95.8	69	35	50.7
	TOTAL	549	103	18.8	366	166	45.4	488	459	94.1	1403	728	51.9

1= includes "irassharu", o+Verb stem+ninaru

2= e.g. *Shitte imasu hito ni michi o kiku.

TABLE 2 PARTICLES

ob. = total tokens of obligatory context
 # = actual tokens correctly repeated

Sec- Hubs	items/meanings	J1			J2			J4			TOTAL		
		ob.	#	%	ob.	#	%	ob.	#	%	ob.	#	%
I N I T I A L	wa topic	153	130	85.0	102	87	85.3	136	128	94.1	391	345	88.2
	wa contrast	9	8	88.9	6	5	83.3	8	8	100	23	21	91.3
	mo also	36	23	63.9	24	11	45.8	32	30	93.8	92	64	69.6
	ga subject	9	5	11.1	6	4	66.7	8	5	62.5	23	14	60.9
	o object	45	21	46.7	30	20	66.7	40	39	97.5	115	80	69.6
	e directional	9	4	44.4	6	5	83.3	8	8	100	23	17	73.9
	ni locational	18	10	55.6	12	2	16.7	16	13	81.3	46	25	54.3
	ni directional	18	15	83.3	12	7	58.3	16	15	93.8	46	37	80.4
	to temporal	18	8	44.4	12	6	50.0	16	14	87.5	46	28	60.9
	no embedded sub	9	4	44.4	6	3	50.0	8	8	100	23	15	65.2
	no possessive	27	18	66.7	18	10	55.6	24	24	100	69	52	75.3
	TOTAL	351	246	70.1	234	160	68.4	312	292	93.6	897	698	77.8
M I D D L E	wa topic	72	23	31.9	48	28	58.3	64	58	90.6	184	109	59.2
	wa contrast	27	3	11.1	18	5	27.8	24	19	79.2	69	27	39.1
	wa emphasis	9	6	66.7	6	2	33.3	8	4	50.0	23	12	52.1
	mo also	9	1	11.1	6	0	0	8	4	50.0	23	11	47.8
	ga subject	45	7	15.6	30	16	53.3	40	36	90.0	115	73	63.5
	ga but	45	15	33.3	30	17	56.7	40	40	100	115	72	62.6
	o object	45	6	13.3	30	12	40.0	40	36	100	115	54	47.0
	e directional	18	4	22.2	12	9	75.0	16	12	75.0	39	25	64.1
	ni locational	18	4	22.2	12	0	0	16	12	75.0	30	16	53.3
	ni directional	72	22	30.6	48	18	37.5	64	46	71.9	184	86	46.7
	de instrumental	27	9	33.3	18	10	55.6	24	22	91.7	69	41	59.4
	o temporal	9	1	11.1	6	2	33.3	8	6	75.0	23	9	39.1
	to quotative	54	2	3.7	36	9	25.0	48	48	100	138	59	42.8
	kara causal	18	3	16.7	12	6	50.0	16	16	100	46	25	54.3
	ka wh+ka	27	3	11.1	18	3	16.7	24	20	83.3	69	26	37.7
	no embedded sub	18	0	0	12	0	0	16	14	87.5	46	14	30.4
	o possessive	18	0	0	12	4	33.3	16	13	81.3	46	17	40.0
	yo	18	0	0	12	0	0	16	11	68.8	46	11	23.9
	TOTAL	549	109	19.9	366	141	38.5	488	417	85.5	1403	667	47.5
F I N A L	wa topic	36	6	16.7	24	5	20.8	32	22	68.8	92	33	35.9
	wa contrast	9	0	0	6	0	0	8	8	100	23	8	34.8
	wa emphasis	18	1	5.6	12	2	16.7	16	10	62.5	46	13	28.3
	mo also	9	1	11.1	6	1	16.7	8	2	25.0	23	4	17.4
	ga subject	18	1	5.6	12	2	16.7	16	14	87.5	46	17	37.0
	o object	18	3	16.7	12	3	25.0	16	16	100	46	22	47.8
	ni directional	27	1	3.7	18	2	11.1	24	16	66.7	69	19	27.5
	to quotative	27	2	7.4	18	11	61.1	24	22	91.7	69	35	50.7
	kara causal	9	0	0	6	0	0	8	5	62.5	23	5	21.7
	yo	9	0	0	6	0	16.7	8	7	87.5	23	7	30.4
	TOTAL	180	15	8.3	114	27	23.7	160	122	76.3	454	164	36.1
GRAND TOTAL		1080	370	34.3	714	328	45.9	960	831	86.6	2754	1529	55.5

TABLE 3 VERB FORMS

ob. = total tokens of obligatory context
 # = actual tokens of correct repetition

Situations	items/meanings	J1			J2			J4			TOTAL		
		ob.	#	%	ob.	#	%	ob.	#	%	ob.	#	%
INITIAL	copula -desu/da	9	8	88.9	6	6	100	8	8	100	23	22	95.7
	non-past -masu/ru	9	6	66.7	6	5	83.3	8	8	100	23	20	87.0
	past -ta	9	6	66.7	6	6	100	8	8	100	23	20	87.0
	animate-inanimate -aru/iru	9	2	22.2	6	0	0	8	7	87.5	23	9	39.1
	intensive -oo	9	4	44.4	6	4	66.7	8	8	100	23	16	69.6
	no politeness-marking in sub-clause	18	4	22.2	12	7	58.3	16	15	93.8	40	26	65.0
	TOTAL	63	30	47.6	42	28	66.7	56	54	96.4	161	113	70.2
MIDDLE	copula -desu/da	9	8	88.9	16	10	62.5	8	8	100	33	26	78.8
	non-past -masu/ru	45	14	31.1	30	12	40.0	40	37	92.5	115	63	54.8
	past -ta	63	10	15.9	42	18	42.9	56	51	91.1	161	79	49.1
	progressive -teiru/teita	9	3	33.3	6	5	83.3	8	4	50.0	23	12	52.2
	animate-inanimate -aru/iru	27	11	40.7	18	4	22.2	24	20	83.3	69	35	50.7
	benefactive -morau/-kureru/-ageru	27	0	0	18	2	11.1	24	21	87.5	69	23	33.3
	provisional -eba	18	3	16.7	12	5	41.7	16	14	87.5	46	22	47.8
	representative -tari	18	3	16.7	12	11	91.7	16	15	93.8	46	29	63.0
	-ninaru/suru	9	0	0	6	0	0	8	7	87.5	23	7	30.4
	honorifics ²	27	2	7.4	18	2	11.1	24	19	79.2	69	23	33.3
	no politeness-marking in sub-clause	117	12	10.7	78	27	34.6	104	95	91.3	299	134	44.8
	TOTAL	369	66	17.9	246	96	39.0	328	291	88.7	943	453	48.0
FINAL	copula -desu/da	63	12	19.0	42	18	42.9	56	54	96.4	161	84	52.2
	non-past -masu/ru	90	22	24.4	60	32	53.3	80	73	91.3	230	127	55.2
	past -ta	189	42	22.2	126	69	54.8	168	163	97.0	483	274	56.7
	progressive -teiru/teita	45	14	31.1	30	12	40.0	40	37	92.5	115	63	54.8
	animate-inanimate -aru/iru	27	4	14.9	18	5	27.8	24	21	87.5	69	30	43.5
	benefactive -morau/kureru/-ageru	9	0	0	6	0	0	8	6	75.0	23	6	26.1
	intensive -oo	27	6	22.2	18	3	16.7	24	24	100	69	31	45.0
	provisional -eba	9	1	11.1	6	5	83.3	8	8	100	23	14	60.9
	representative -tari	9	1	11.1	6	1	16.7	8	5	62.5	23	7	30.4
	-ninaru/suru	36	0	0	24	5	20.8	32	30	93.8	92	35	38.0
	no politeness-marking in sub-clause	18	0	0	12	4	33.3	16	15	93.8	46	19	41.3
	-garu, -rashii, -tsumori	27	0	0	18	12	66.7	24	23	95.8	69	35	50.7
	TOTAL	549	103	18.8	366	166	45.4	488	459	94.1	1403	728	51.9

1= includes "irassharu", o+Verb stem+ninaru

2= e.g. *Shitte imasu hito ni michi o kiku.

Figure 1. Particle repetition by J1

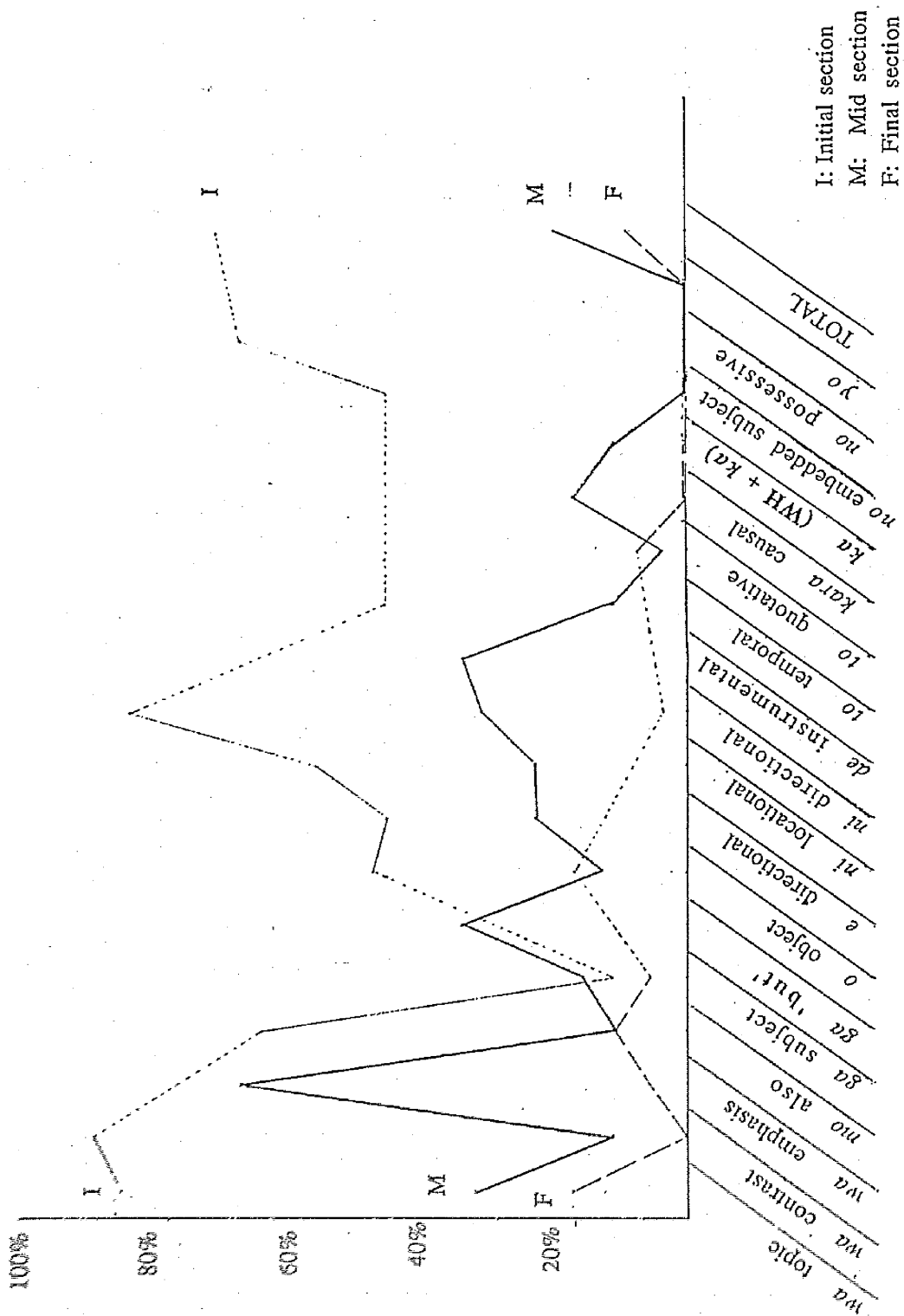


Figure 2. Particle repetition by J2

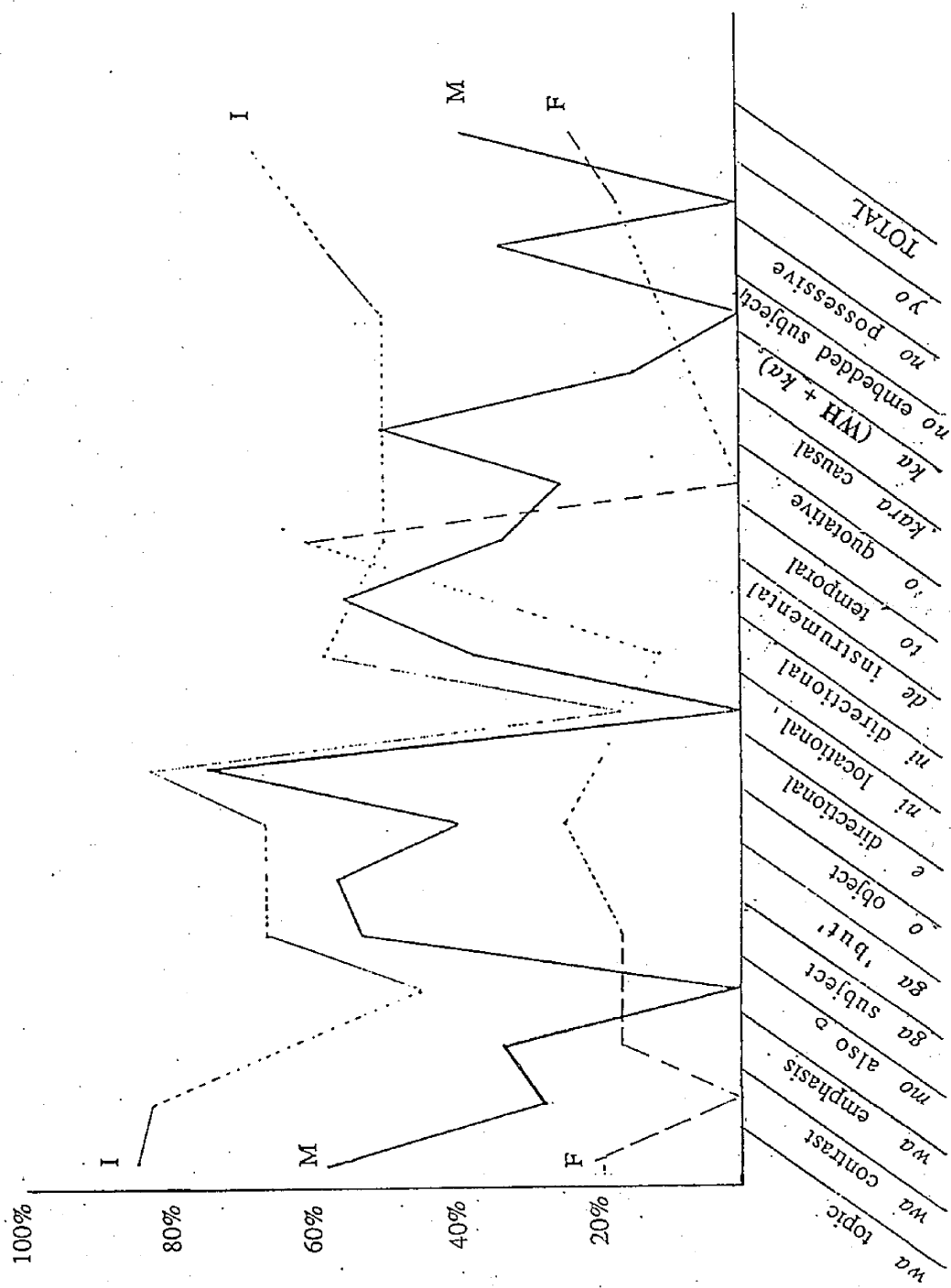


Figure 3. Particle repetition by J4

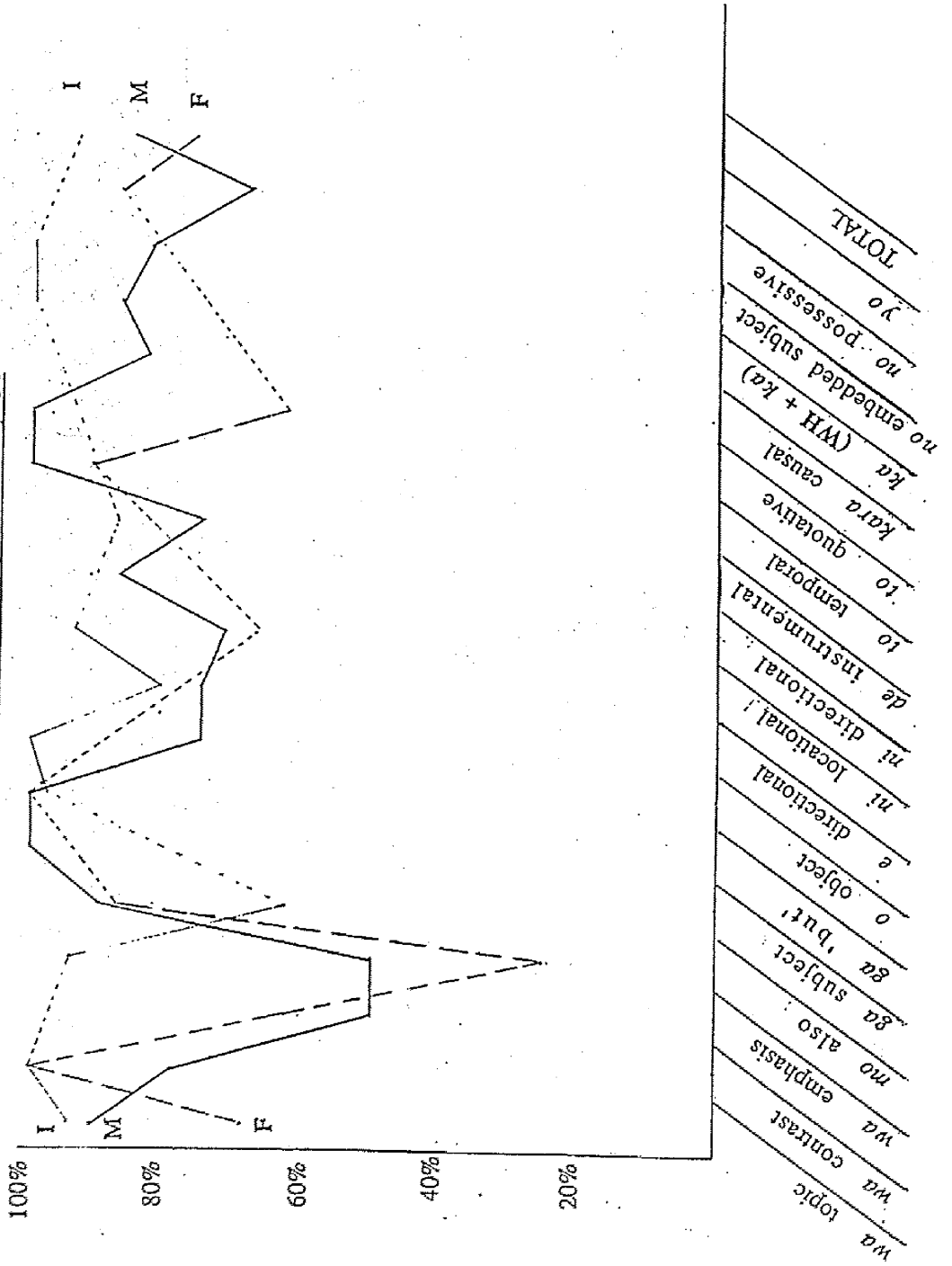
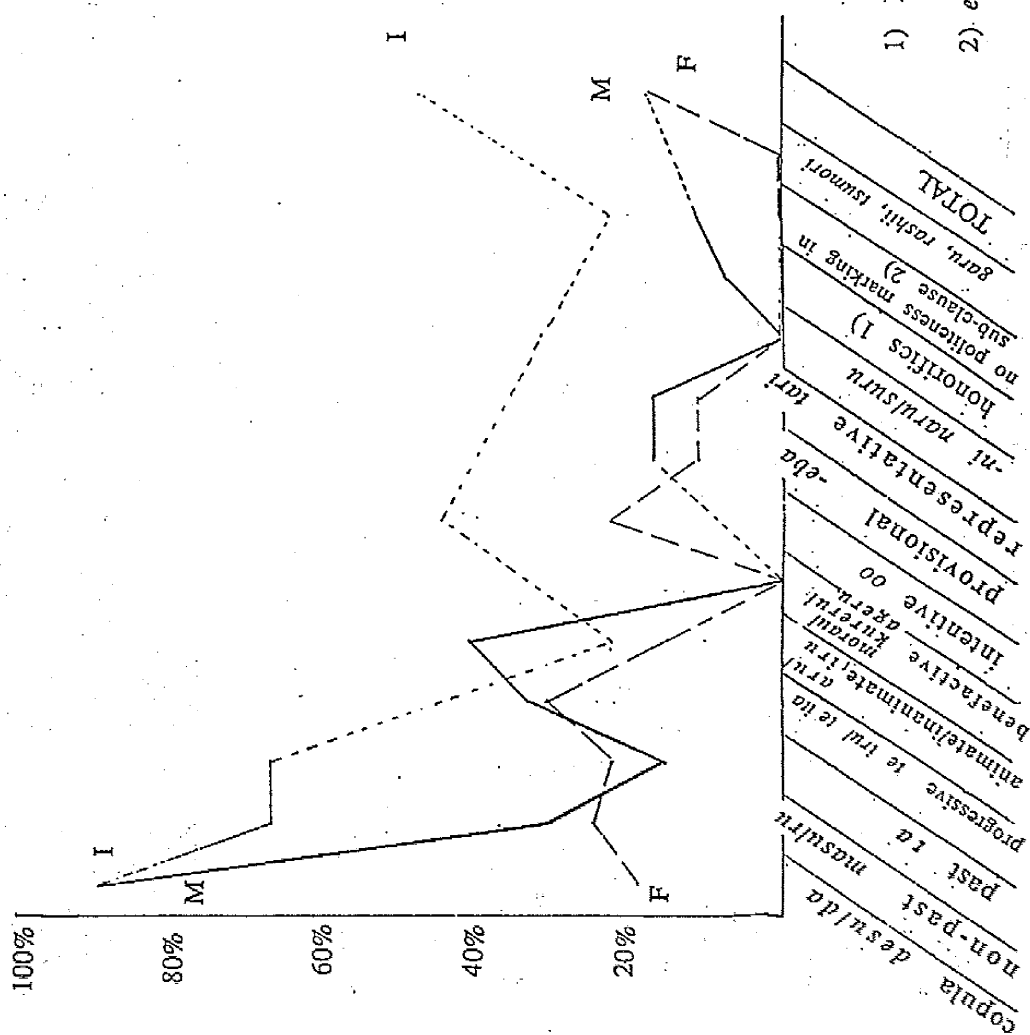
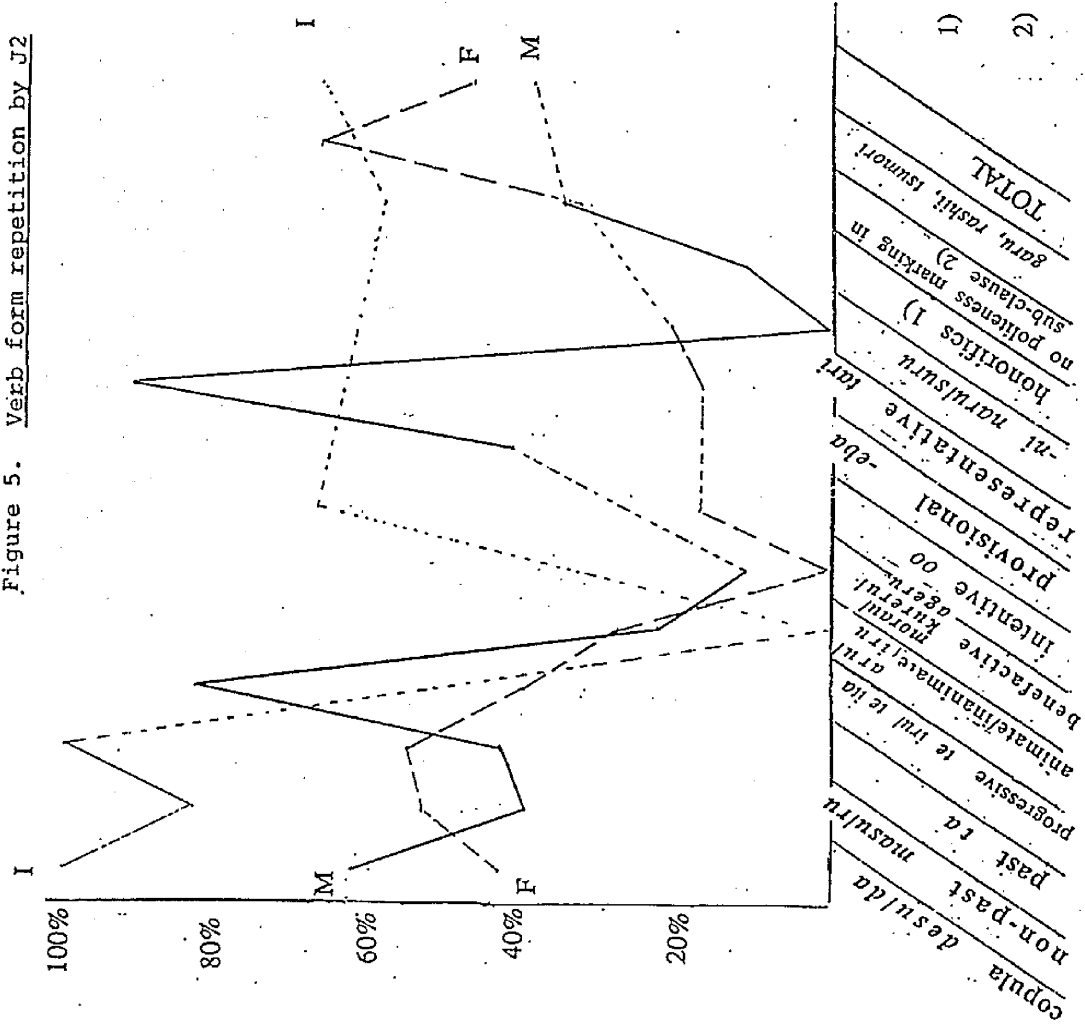


Figure 4. Verb form repetition by J1



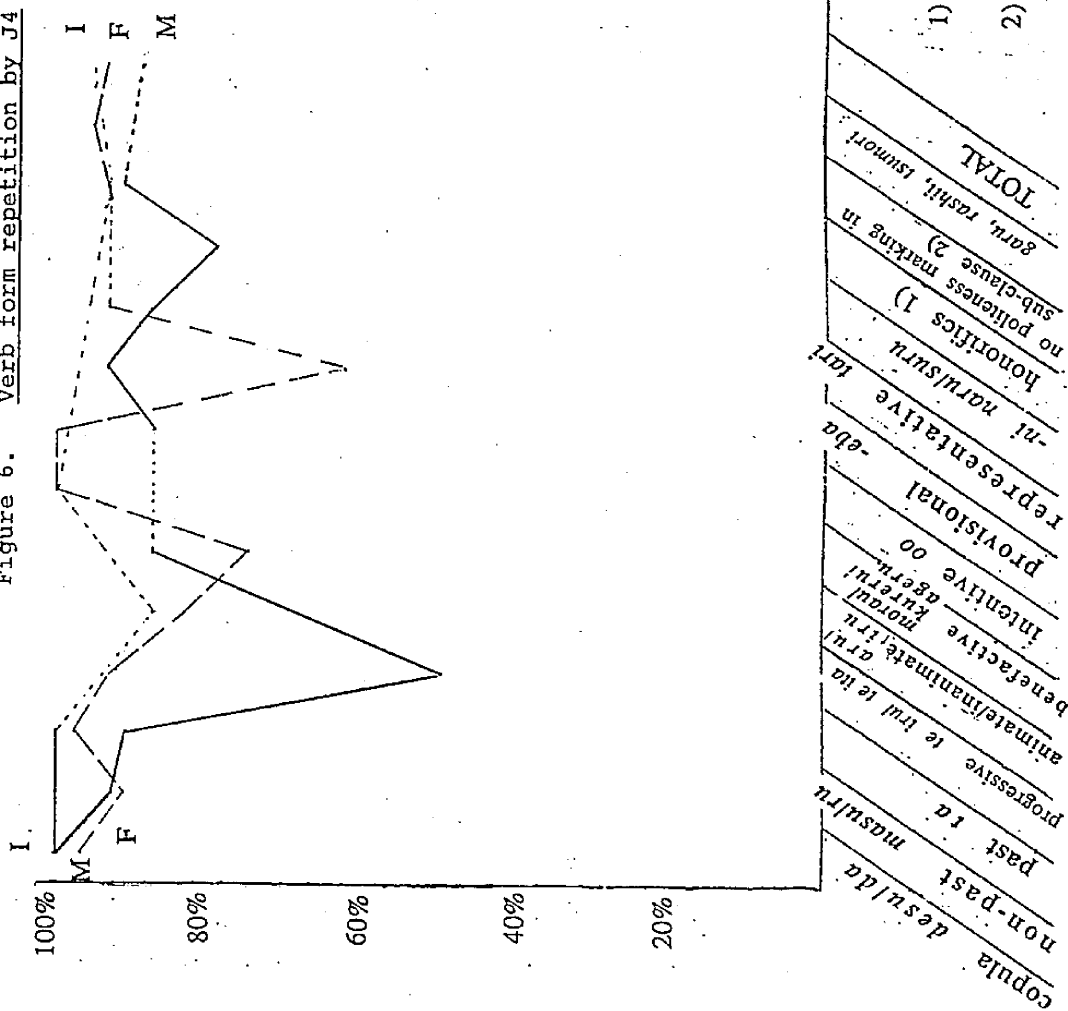
- 1) Includes irassharu, o + V stem + ni naru
- 2) eg. *Shite imasu hito ni michi o kiku.

Figure 5. Verb form repetition by J2



- 1) Includes irassharu, o + V stem + ni naru
- 2) eg. *Shitte imasu hito ni michi o kiku.

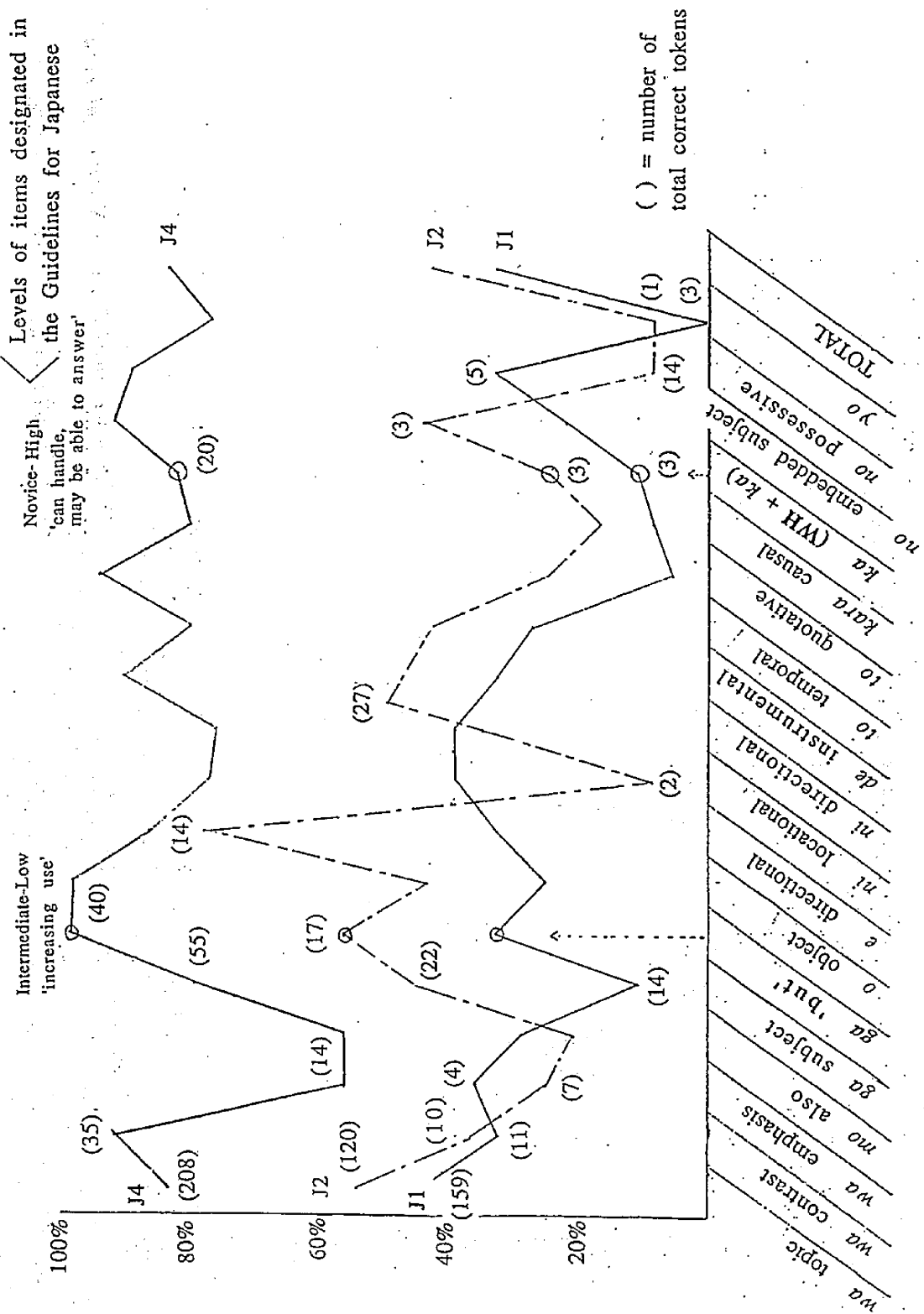
Figure 6. Verb form repetition by J4

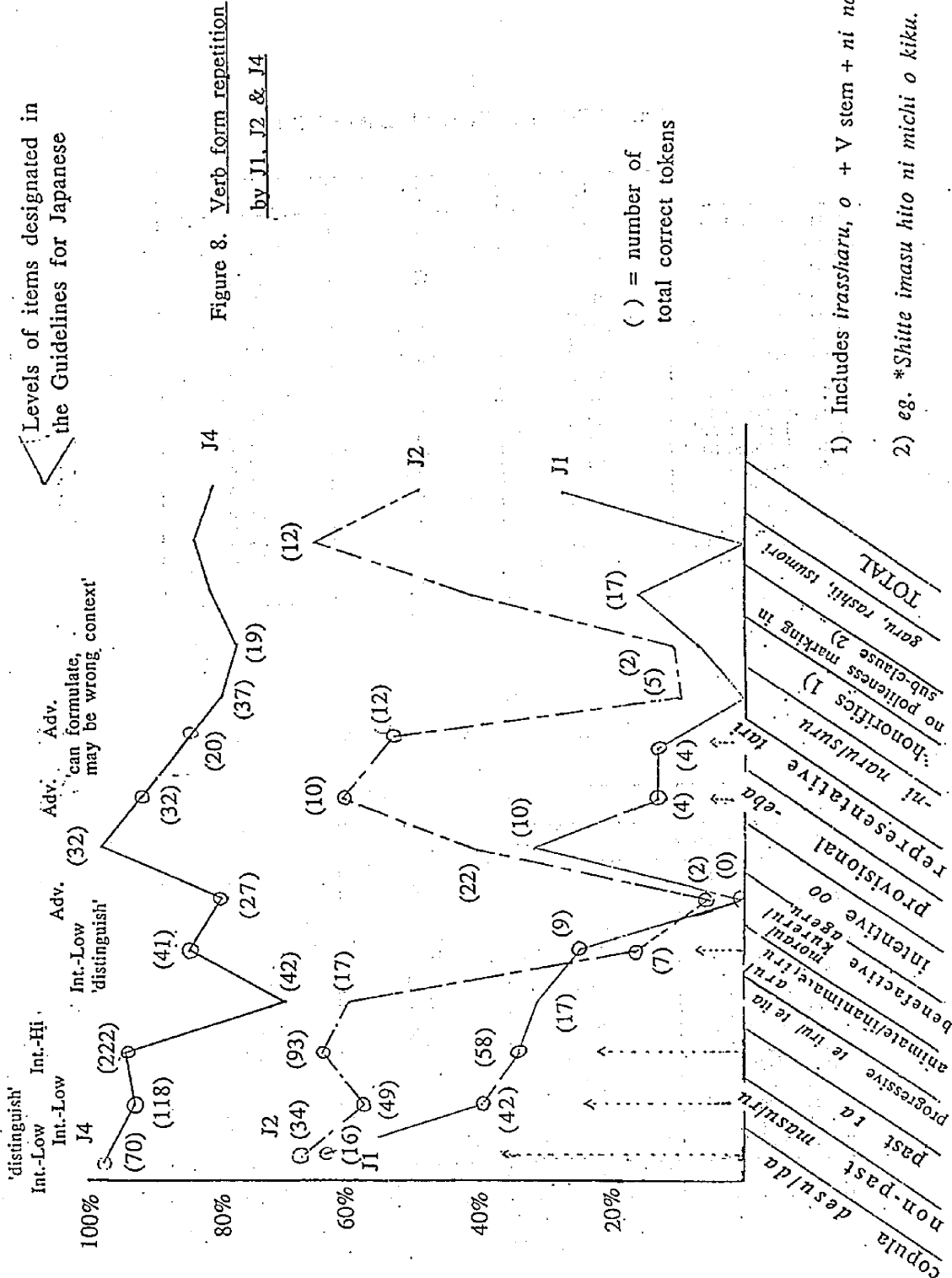


1) Includes irassharu, o + V stem + ni naru

2) eg. *Shite imasu hito ni michi o kiku.

Figure 7. Particle repetition by J1, J2 & J4.





- 1) Includes irassharu, o + V stem + ni naru
- 2) eg. *Shitte imasu hito ni michi o kiku.

TABLE 4
AVERAGE RESULTS OF THE PARTICLE REPETITION

	J1	J2	J4
items/meanings	%	%	%
wa topic	44.5	54.8	84.5
wa contrast	33.3	37.0	93.1
wa emphasis	36.2	25	56.3
mo also	28.7	20.8	56.3
ga subject	10.8	45.6	80
ga but	33.3	56.7	100
o object	25.6	43.9	99.2
e directional	33.3	79.2	87.5
ni locational	38.9	8.4	78.2
ni directional	39.2	35.6	77.5
de instrumental	33.3	50	91.7
to temporal	27.8	33.4	81.3
to quotative	5.6	43.1	95.9
kara causal	8.4	25	81.3
ka WH + ka	11.1	16.7	83.3
no embedded sub	22.2	25	93.8
no possessive	33.4	44.5	90.7
yo	0	8.4	78.2
TOTAL	32.8	43.5	85.1

TABLE 5
AVERAGE RESULTS OF THE VERB FORM REPETITION

	J1	J2	J4
items & meaning	%	%	%
copula -desu/da	65.6	68.5	98.8
non-past -masu	40.7	58.9	94.6
past -ta	34.9	65.9	96.0
progressive	32.2	61.7	71.3
animate/inanimate	25.9	16.7	86.1
benefactive	0	5.6	81.3
intensive	33.3	41.7	100
provisional	13.9	62.5	93.8
representative	13.9	54.2	78.2
-ni naru/suru	0	10.4	90.7
honorifics	7.4	11.1	79.2
politeness in sub-clause	16.5	42.1	93.0
-garu, -rasii, -tsumori	0	66.7	95.8
TOTAL	28.1	50.4	93.1

J2), however, the middle section approaches the results of the first (see Figure 2). Interestingly, this is when the discrepancy among items seems the most obvious, showing somewhat all-or-nothing tendency in both of the tasks. For the fourth year students (henceforth J4) the difference among sections becomes much smaller and the achievement becomes more even across items (see Figure 3). No statistical analysis was performed to examine the significance of the differences among levels.

Hypothesis 1 was born out for J1 and J4, but a closer analysis is necessary to determine the status of J2. Since the results in each section of a sentence followed a somewhat general pattern, the average figures of the three sections was used to compare the results across levels. The results are shown in Tables 4 and 5, and also in Figures 7 and 8. The higher levels showed the tendency to perform more accurately, and the difference was clearer between the two lower levels J1 & J2 and J4. For the purpose of this paper, it seems reasonable to state that Hypothesis 2 was also born out. The numbers in parentheses in Figures 7 and 8 represent the number of actual tokens to help interpret the relative reliability of the items concerned. The items which appear in the Guidelines are printed in bold letters at the bottom of the Figures and also shown by the small circles around the percentage value. The respective levels designated in the Guidelines and their description are shown at the top of the Figures. The same values are plotted on Figures 9 and 10 to show the performance patterns for each item. Again, the items included in the Guidelines are marked as such.

V. DISCUSSION

Firstly, it should be mentioned that the author is aware of the limitations of the test form utilized, which is to test the performance in the obligatory contexts only (see Long and Sato, 1984, for a detailed discussion). Whereas such an approach is favored over the error analysis which would concentrate solely on the erroneous performances, it lacks the structure to examine the other contexts in which a learner utilizes a given form. In Figures 7 and 8, a sudden surge of "correct" responses are seen in items, such as the subject *ga*, the directional *e*, and the provisional *eba*...etc. This might be an indication of the hypothesis testing state of the learners, where they may overuse a given item in his/her speech. Huebner (1984:11) proposes that "under certain conditions, an interlanguage grammatical system must be neutralized before a new one can be established." The corollaries to this are:

...the acquisition of the target language function of a given interlanguage may require the reduction of the use of that form in target language obligatory contexts. Second, ...(such acquisitional process) may require an increase in the use of that form in target language ungrammatical contexts. (11)

Whether or not the learners in the present study use the test items in ungrammatical contexts could only be examined with broader language samples. If in fact such a process is being employed by the learners, the actual figures representing their acquisition would be lowered. As a learner progresses through his/her interlanguage, a "flooding" effect, in

Huebner's terms, occurs which broadens the context for a given item. This is when the learner uses a certain item in "correct" as well as "incorrect" contexts. However, as the learner keeps on testing his/her hypothesis about the language, a gradual "trickling" of the item follows, which restricts the environment of the item closer to that of a native speaker.

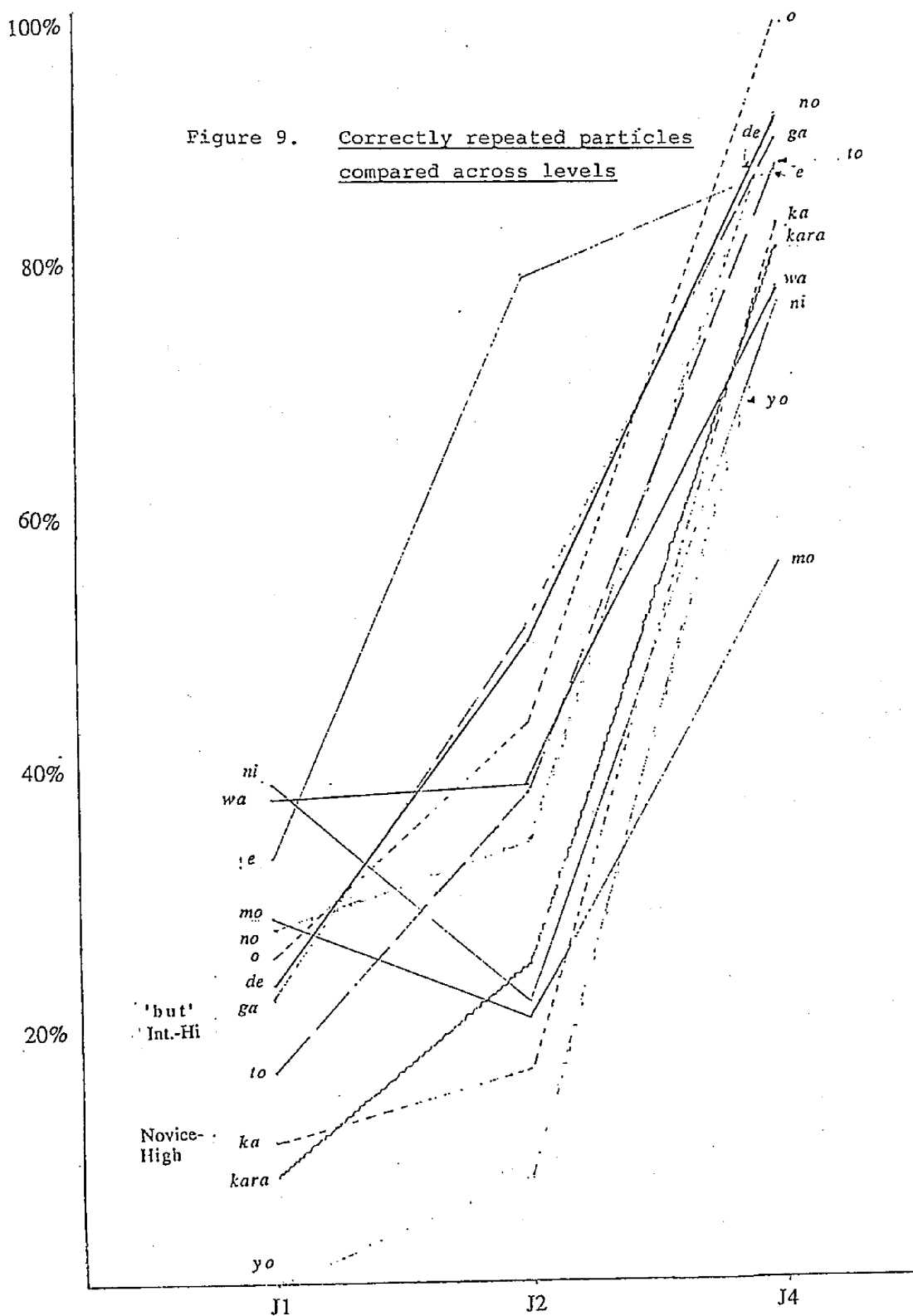
One indication of learners' hypothesis testing is seen in Figures 9 and 10. Notice that for some items, the accuracy rates decrease from J1 to J2 before they go up to the values of J4. There are at least two possible reasons for this phenomenon. One is the effect of the above mentioned "flooding" taking place. Second is that interrelating processing constraints are working to suppress certain forms (Pinemann, 1984).

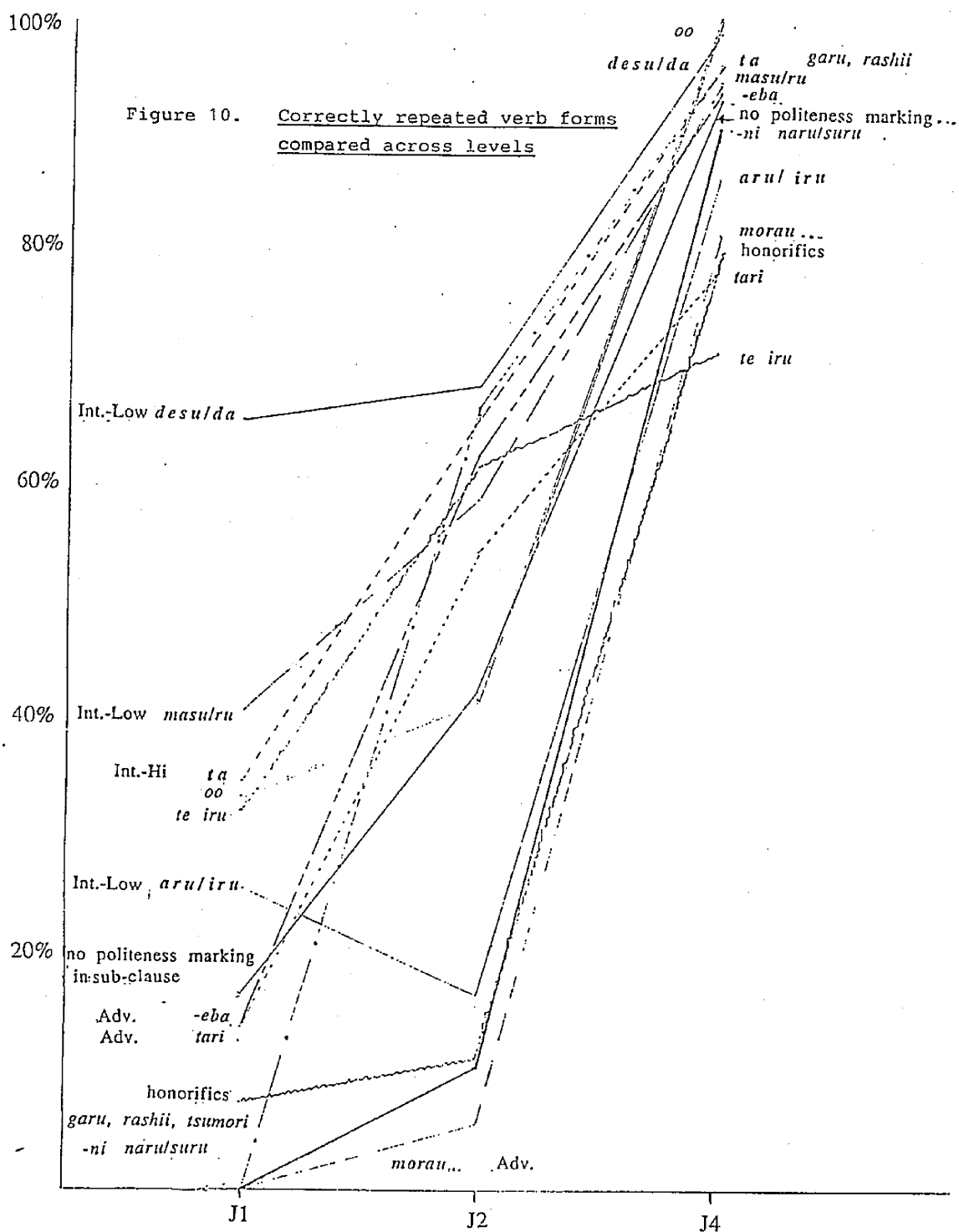
Recall that the order of ease of repeating a string of words was the initial, the final, then the mid portion. Therefore it was anticipated initially that the percentage of correct repetition of the final section would be higher than that of the mid section. The actual results, however, showed the order of the initial, the mid and then the final portion.

Now let's look at the features in the Guidelines that appear in the data. One thing that is immediately noticeable is the imbalance of the included items in favor of verb forms (see Figure 9 for the results of particles and Figure 10 for the results of verb forms). Even the particles that are included are very limited and the choice seems arbitrary. One wonders if there is any strong evidence that the question marker *ka* and *ga* (meaning 'but') indicate a learner's level more than items such as *wa* (various usages), *ga* (subject), *o* (object), and *de* (various usages). This can be termed as the problem of item choice.

Next is the problem of level assignment to the features. A casual glance at the lineup of the relevant features in Figure 10 finds a general agreement of the difficulty with the learners' performance. Notice, however, the positioning of the past tense marker *ta*. Also, animate/inanimate distinction (*-aru/-iru*) seems to go through a challenging stage between J1 and J4. Even though this animate/inanimate verb choice is termed Intermediate-Low level, the J2 results go down to approach the results of those items which are listed as Advanced. This may again be due to some interlanguage developmental phenomena. Could this not negatively affect learners at J2 level in an ACTFL Interview? In this study, some of the corresponding items between the test and the Guidelines were not analyzable due to the limited data. It is predicted that with a larger sample, more items with a pattern similar to the *aru/iru* forms would emerge. This would supply a stronger support to the argument on the process of interlanguage hypothesis testing.

Thirdly there is the point of inconsistent description in the Guidelines, which is seen on the top of Figures 7 and 8. The phrases used are "distinguish, control, can formulate, increasing use, can handle" ...etc. Even though the Guidelines are written in a narrative form, such loose description does not seem to give the testers a clear enough criteria for assessment. If in fact such features are to be included in the Guideline, more clear-cut definition is indispensable. Points to be considered may include:





1. Appearance vs. non-appearance of a given item (Measuring the learner's ability to paraphrase is yet another issue).
This point can be simply put in the guideline as,
"Does not produce it."
2. Receptive vs. productive functionability of a given item.
"Can comprehend upon hearing, but does not produce it."
3. Appropriateness of an given item.
"Produces but only in non-correct environments."

The next problem may sound contradictory to above since it questions the validity of the choice of such morphological and syntactic features in the Guidelines in the first place. Johnston (1984) emphasizes the status of variational features in interlanguage development. Unlike developmental features, they are influenced by sociocultural aspects of communication, that by definition their acquisition order varies from learner to learner. In order for accurate assessments to be done, then, the distinction between developmental and variational features become crucial. Testers need to be familiarized with such a concept, and should only be concerned with the developmental features and learn to ignore variational features. Therefore, it follows that if one acknowledges such feature distinction as Byrnes does (116), it is logically impossible to include them in the Guidelines until clear typological distinction is made. What the Guidelines for Japanese includes seems to contradict Byrnes' statement (117):

..unlike most other testing procedures, (proficiency testing)
does not rely on syntactic descriptions but presupposes a task
orientation which values and attempts to establish a speaker's
overall communicative effectiveness.

VI. CONCLUSION

Within the scope of the limitation of a repetition test and the given number of subjects, a number of problems of the ACTFL Guidelines for Japanese were found. First was the problem of the feature choice, which focused more on verb forms and not on morphology, especially particles. As it has often been pointed out, the choice of features seems to lack a reasonable theoretical backbone, and the data for this study indicated that there are other particles that may function as more salient indicators of a given level. Second was the level assignment. Although there was a rough correspondence between the levels given in the Guideline and those of the data, it was indicated that learners' non-linear acquisition may create a problem in post-beginning level learners. Third was the loose description of the Guidelines, which seemed not adequate in effectively "guiding" the testers. The last was on the proposed bidimensional acquisition process. If in fact there are variational and developmental features, proficiency testing should make clear distinction between them and only rely on the latter for assessment. Until such distinction is proven, it would be dangerous to include the ambiguous features in the Guidelines.

Since the present study is no more than a pilot study in its size, nothing conclusive is intended. In order to understand the process of language acquisition and learnability problems, longitudinal studies with a

variety of subjects are certainly called for. However, because of their involvement, such studies require well thought-out research questions based on solid grounds. Small-scale studies, on the other hand, may not be able to conclude any grandiose results, but provide results that can be accumulated to help solidify, or challenge existing ideas and theories.

In the field of language teaching, even though many people are aware of the pendulum swinging history due to "lack of theory" or however way one might put it, still too much depends on intuition and feel of teachers and native speakers. Oral Proficiency Testing seems to be no exception. The author realizes that trial and error is one way to examine hypotheses. Still at the same time, in order for the curriculum, syllabi and the assessment to be ultimately effective, it is strongly felt that such trials need to be based on a firm ground. This study is an attempt to contribute to such a direction of having a scientific eye on understanding language acquisition.

NOTE

1) Special thanks goes to Dr. Michael Long, who at that time was the Director of the Center, for making the data available for me. The present analysis is my own, and any mistakes or errors, of course, is mine.

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APPENDIX

ACTFL Guidelines for Japanese: Draft (December 1985)

Japanese Descriptions - Speaking

Novice-Low: Oral production is limited to isolated words, such as *SAYONARA*, *HAI*, or common loan words in English such as *KIMONO*. Essentially no functional communicative ability.

Novice-Mid: Oral production continues to consist of isolated words and phrases within very predictable areas of need. Vocabulary is sufficient only for handling simple, elementary needs and expressing basic courtesies such as *OHAYOO (GOZAIMASU)*, *KONNICHIIWA*, *ARIGATOO (GOZAIMASU)*, *DOOZO*, and *DOOMO*... Speech may be hesitant.

Novice-High: Able to satisfy partially the requirements of basic communicative exchanges. Can handle a very limited number of simple questions such as *NAN DESU KA?*, *DOKO DESU KA?*, *DARE DESU KA?* and may be able to answer such questions. Vocabulary centers on categories such as basic objects and activities. May utilize English words within a Japanese context without appropriate phonological adaptation, for example *AIRPORT DOKO DESU KA?* Able to count but not to use the classifier system. Delivery may still be strongly influenced by the first language.

Intermediate-Low: Able to handle successfully a limited number of interactive, task-oriented and social situations. Self-correction may frequently occur, particularly in the area of basic construction. Can ask and answer questions such as *IMA NAN-JI DESU KA?* and maintain very simple face-to-face conversations, although in a highly restricted manner and with much linguistic inaccuracy. Is able to distinguish, at the *-MASU/ DESU* level, past/non-past and affirmative/negative for the three major predicate types (i.e. ,verbs, adjectives, and noun plus copula). Can distinguish among *ARIMASU*, *IMASU* and *DESU*. Vocabulary still limited but is expanding to include word classes other than nouns. Beginning to control the use of the *KO/SO/A/DO* system, and to use classifiers such as *-EN*, *-MAI*, and *-JI*. Delivery may continue to be strongly influenced by the first language.

Intermediate-Mid: Able to handle successfully a variety of uncomplicated, basic and communicative tasks and social situations such as asking and giving simple directions, making simple requests, and describing daily activities. Utterance length increases slightly, but speech may continue to be characterized by frequent long pauses. Vocabulary has increased so as to permit simple isolated comments such as *ATSUI DESU NE* and *OMOSHIROI DESU NE*. Has control of both number systems (*ICHI*, *NI*,

SAN ... and HITOTSU, FUTATSU, MITTSU...), and the use of classifiers is expanded. Beginning to use particles appropriately. Able to use -MASHOO, -DESHOO, and -TAI forms. Beginning to use sentence connectives such as SORE KARA and DEMO. Delivery may continue to be strongly influenced by the first language.

Intermediate-High: Able to handle successfully most basic uncomplicated communicative tasks and social situations such as introductions, simple telephone calls, and simple negotiations. Beginning to distinguish politeness and formality usage. Beginning to distinguish between the use of verbal-MASU/-TE IMASU. Increasing use of such patterns as the -TE form in *GOHAN O TABETE, KAERIMASHITA ; KARA in TAKAI (DESU) KARA , KEDO in TAKAI DESU KEDO KAIMASU; and GA in TAKAI (DESU) GA, KAIMASU. Developing control of the use of informal forms (IKU/ITTA, TAKAI/TAKAKATTA, and-DA/DATTA). Beginning to control comparative and superlatives. Range of vocabulary is increasing, particularly in the areas of time and space expressions, kinship terms, and a fuller range of motion verbs. Delivery may continue to be strongly influenced by the first language.*

Advanced: Able to satisfy the requirements of everyday situations including routine classroom and work situations. Can handle in a general way biological information, daily life, work, and leisure activities. Can handle situations involving prohibition, permission, necessity, and advice. Able with some cultural sensitivity to satisfy routine social demands as a host or guest, to accept and refuse offers and invitations, and to participate in interviews. Marked improvement in delivery, in terms of intonation, hesitation noises, and "aizuchi". Can formulate the following but may not use them within an appropriate context with facility: inflectional forms such as *MATTARA, MATEBA, MATTARI ; transitive/intransitive pairs (AKERU/AKU) with appropriate accompanying particles; verb phrases such as -TE KURU, -TE OKU, -TE ARU, -TE SHIMAU, -TE KURERU , -TE MORAU , etc.; patterns that include KOTO, TOKORO, and MONO such as SURU KOTO NI NARU, SURU TOKORO DESU, SHITA MONO DESU. Can use nominalizer NO in constructions such as SURU NO GA SUKI DESU. Beginning to control formation of compounds, e.g., TABESUGIRU, GENKISUGIRU, TABEKATA, HOSONAGAI, DENKIGAISHA. Uses with some facility nouns preceded by modifiers of varying length and complexity, such as WATASHI NO KAITA HON, KAMI NO NAGAI HITO, and HISHO GA OTOKO NO JIMUSHO. Still speaks hesitantly at times and gropes for words, but shows marked improvement in overall fluency. Able to distinguish among facts, opinions, reports, expectations, speculations, assumptions, plans, etc. Can link sentences together smoothly.*

Advanced-Plus: Able to satisfy the requirements of a broad variety of everyday classroom and work situations. Shows some ability to communicate on concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence. Can discuss topics of current and personal interest and can handle with considerable precision most requirements of daily life,

such as handling household problems, making travel arrangements, making and breaking appointments, coping with emergencies, etc. Increased naturalness of delivery in terms of intonation, hesitation noises, and "aizuchi". Demonstrates stronger control of inflectional forms and only rarely makes errors in the use of particles. Vocabulary has broadened sufficiently to handle topics related to particular interests and special fields of competence. Increasing use of Chinese compounds. Demonstrates fluent use of the language, which is maintained even under tension or pressure.

Superior: Able to speak the language with at least sufficient accuracy to participate in most formal and informal conversations on various practical, social, and professional topics. Can discuss particular interests and special fields of competence with reasonable ease. Can give a talk, make an informal speech, and relate experiences with appropriate discourse style. Can support opinions, hypothesize and conjecture. Vocabulary is broad but the speaker may continue to grope for words.