Anaphoric Referencing of the Demonstrative “This” as a Sentence Starter in Argumentative Essays: A Comparison between Native and Japanese Student Writers of English

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1. Introduction
Despite their key role as a cohesive device, anaphoric referencing of demonstratives has not received full attention in academic writing research and instruction. Recent corpus-based research, however, has revealed significant discoveries and insights in anaphoric uses of the demonstrative “this,” among others, in the sentence-initial position in academic prose (Biber et al., 1999; Gray 2010; Swales, 2005; Wulff et al., 2012). Most striking is that the demonstrative “this” is frequently used as a pronoun for anaphoric referencing, which seems to be contrary to the recommended use as a determiner for the purpose of clear referencing by academic style guides such as Swales and Feak (2000).

In line with advances in learner corpus research, second-language writing researchers have begun to explore the use of the anaphoric demonstrative “this” by non-native writers of English (Jin, 2019; Oh, 2009; Petch-Tyson, 2000). The current study was largely motivated by Jin’s (2019) study, in which the anaphoric use of the demonstrative “this” was closely examined using entrance exam essays produced by non-native applicants to a U.S. university; however, the study is limited in that the corpus did not include comparable essays by native writers of English, and the linguistic backgrounds of the applicants varied. In an attempt to address these limitations and elicit pedagogical implications, the current study investigates similarities and differences in the anaphoric use of the demonstrative “this” in the sentence-initial position between native English-speaking university students and Japanese university students with varied English proficiency levels. Specifically, the following three research questions (RQs) are addressed:

RQ 1: Are there any similarities or differences across the writer groups in the frequency of the anaphoric use of the sentence-initial “this,” and how does the Japanese students’ demonstrative use vary across their English proficiency levels?
RQ2: When the determinative demonstrative “this” is used, what types of nouns tend to follow it across the writer groups?
RQ3: Are there any similarities or differences across the writer groups in the structural features of the demonstrative’s antecedents?

2. Research Methodology
Writing samples were sourced from the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE), compiled at Kobe University in Japan. This is a collection of argumentative essays produced not only by university students learning English in Asia, but also by their native English-speaking counterparts under the same strictly controlled conditions (Ishikawa, 2013). English proficiency levels of all learners have been linked to Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) levels. The composition of the target essays used for RQs 1 and 2 is shown in Table 1, while a sub-component of the essays was examined for RQ 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Composition of Essay Data Used for RQs 1 and 2</th>
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<td>Student Writers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native English Writers</td>
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<td>Japanese Learners of English</td>
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Structural features of the demonstrative’s antecedents were coded and discussed by the present researcher and a native English-speaking researcher who has been teaching English at a Japanese university. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted with the aid of a concordancing software, AntConc (Anthony, 2018).

3. Results and Discussion
Figures 1-3 illustrate the normalized frequency of the demonstrative use per 1,000 words in each writer group, the semantic types of nouns that follow the demonstratives, and the distribution of structural features of the antecedents, respectively. Few instances of the sentence-initial demonstrative “this” were found in the essays by Japanese writers at the B2 level, due to the low number of essays available for the analyses in RQs 2 and 3, so these instances were
discarded from Figures 2 and 3.

Figure 1: Normalized frequency of the sentence-initial demonstrative “this” (per 1,000 words)

Figure 2: Semantic types of the nouns that follow the demonstrative “this”
Overall, compared to native English writers, Japanese students were found to significantly underuse the anaphoric demonstrative “this” in the sentence-initial position \( (p < 0.01) \). However, all groups of writers were found to use the demonstrative “this” as a pronoun more frequently than as a determiner, which is inconsistent with the previous research findings and indicates a need for further examination. In addition, writers tended to increase the pronominal use of “this” as they became more proficient in English. By contrast, the demonstrative use as a determiner was taken to be largely unchanged across the English proficiency levels.

The largest portion of the noun types that follow the determinative demonstrative “this” across the writer groups was shell nouns, but more variation was found in the essays by native English writers. In terms of the structural features of the demonstrative’s antecedents, all the writer groups preferred to rely on anaphoric references directly in the preceding clause, sentence, or discourse chunk, possibly because they were concerned about making themselves understood clearly. Interestingly, Japanese writers were unique in that they tended to employ problematic global references in an attempt to summarize multiple viewpoints in previous discourse. Instead, indirect referencing, which means that the antecedent of the demonstrative was not explicitly identified and required inferencing by the reader, was found in some of
the essays by native English writers.

4. Implications
A far more extensive study should be conducted to gain a more detailed picture of the anaphoric demonstrative use by native and Japanese writers of English; nevertheless, the findings of the current study suggest that the effective use of the demonstrative “this” in the sentence-initial position as an anaphoric pronoun or determiner must be taught and practiced in second language academic writing classrooms, not only to raise the learners’ awareness of its role as a cohesive device, but also to improve the clarity of its anaphoric referencing. Also suggested is that a variety of shell nouns need to be introduced to learners, along with specific examples of how to use them when following the anaphoric demonstrative.

References
Swales, J. (2005) ‘Attended and unattended this in academic writing: a long and