Introduction

Whether teachers should correct students' errors in their foreign language learning has been a rather controversial issue for years especially in the field of second language writing since Truscott (1996, 1999) reviews several error feedback studies, strongly claiming that error correction does not work. He indicates that there is no clear evidence to prove the real benefit from correction because previous researchers fail to examine the long-term feedback effect and some studies lack a control group without feedback giving. In addition, some harmful effects of correction are also pointed out such as decreasing writing fluency, increasing anxiety, lowering confidence and others. However, Ferris (1999, 2004) argues that error correction is still necessary as well as useful to students because most students prefer, need and trust teachers' feedback for future writing improvements. She considers it premature to conclude that error correction does not work in that previous studies fail to be well-designed. After the debate, many researchers start to explore what kinds of error feedback are effective. However, their findings have been conflicting.

In the past and present time, several researchers seek to explore whether error correction works from the perspective of feedback giving. They devise different feedback conditions and assess their effects on students' written accuracy. Recent researchers, when evaluating feedback effects, have taken what specific error types are corrected into consideration (e.g. Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Ellis, Sheen, Murakami and Takashima, 2008) since Ferris's (1999) rebuttal to Truscott's (1996) review paper specifies that when correcting students' errors, teachers normally consider different error types as the same ones such as marking verb tense errors similar to marking word choice ones. Ferris and Roberts (2001), after correcting students' errors find some error types treatable and some untreatable. Meanwhile, Wible (2001) suggests that researchers should keep track of specific feedback form and content on different error types to clearly illustrate

feedback effects. Bitchener, et al (2005) discover, when combing a variety of error types together for analyses, error correction does not work. However, when they respectively examine the feedback effects on individual error type, feedback is effective in correcting certain treatable errors. A commentary on Truscott and Hsu's (2008) study reveals that certain error types might be found successfully corrected by teachers' feedback if a specific language feature is longitudinally traced in their study (Bruton, 2009). A distinction between focused and unfocused feedback therefore is drawn (Ellis, 2009). Focused feedback selects one or a few error types for corrections while unfocused feedback corrects all sorts of grammar errors without specifying specific error types (Ellis, Sheen, Murakami & Takashima, 2008; Sheen, Wright & Moldawa, 2009). This distinction sheds new light on feedback literature since most focused feedback studies seem to yield an encouraging result. Previous focused feedback studies however have been criticized that focused feedback which appears to work for article errors might not be effective for the more complex and problematic errors which obscure meaning and inhibit communication (Ferris, 2010). The narrow focus on article errors in focused feedback studies limits the effectiveness of corrective feedback and more research should be conducted to selectively correct other error types that obscure meaning and interfere with communication. What linguistic features should be selected for corrections becomes a significant factor to determine whether the feedback giving is necessary and worthwhile.

Language learners of Japanese have difficulty mastering the use of Japanese case particles because some Japanese case particles are polysemy. They are too similar for students to distinguish from one another (上村文子，2003；呂育弘，2007；林青璇，2009). The use of Japanese case particles is however an indispensable linguistic feature and has communicative values. Learners' misuse of case particles would hinder their language communication. Following is a typical example from a widely-used Japanese textbook (みんなの日本語 II，2006). The

change of the Japanese case particle in bold would change the meaning of the whole sentence.

1. ここ**に**住所と名前を書いてください (Write down your name and address **on the paper**.)
2. ここ**で**住所と名前を書いてください (Write down your name and address **in this place**.)

It is therefore worthy of treating such errors as case particles which obscure meaning and interfere with communication. The purpose of this study is to explore whether focused feedback works in correcting errors in Japanese case particles. Following research question is addressed to fulfill the purpose above.

To what extent does certain focused written corrective feedback work in treating an error in Japanese case particles in two posttests?

Methodology

Research Participants

There are 18 technological college students in northern Taiwan in the current study. They have learnt Japanese for 1.5 years. Research participants were randomly divided into three groups: two experimental groups and one control group. The control group did not receive any error feedback from teachers whereas the experimental groups' errors were corrected by teachers' focused feedback.

Targeted Language Errors

Japanese case particles are suffixes that immediately follow the modified nouns, verbs, adjectives, or sentences. The grammatical features sometimes indicate speaker affect or assertiveness. For substantive, Japanese case particles are used to clearly describe the meaning of declinable words and predicate verbs. The case particles show the logic relationship between declinable words and predicate

verbs (井口厚夫　井口裕子，1994；角田太作，1991).

Writing Tasks

In the present study, students are requested to write down what they have done on the weekends. The writing process lasts for 20 minutes. The use of Japanese case particles is necessary to the writing task so students can use the language feature to complete the task. Since they are beginning learners of Japanese, they are allowed to ask the teacher any vocabulary they need to finish writing.

Corrective Feedback

There are three feedback groups in this study. In the direct feedback group, teachers treat students' errors in Japanese case particles by offering correct language forms (See Appendix A). In the indirect feedback group, students' language errors are only underlined without providing any correct language forms (See Appendix B). In the content feedback group which serves as a control group, teachers do not correct students' language errors. Teachers give comments on students' writing content and organization (See Appendix C).

Research Procedure

The present study investigates whether there is a significant difference among different-group students' accuracy of Japanese case particles in terms of two posttests. On day one, pretests are conducted. One week later, feedback is provided. Each student is requested to look at the feedback for 10 minutes. Subsequently, students are asked to do a second piece of writing (the first posttests). The second posttests are administered two weeks later. The following Table 1 shows the research procedure.

Table 1. Research Procedure

Week	Direct feedback	Indirect feedback	Content feedback
1	Pretest: written narrative		
2	Feedback reviewing + The first posttest: written narrative		
3	Regular class		
4	Regular class		
5	The second posttest: written narrative		

Data Analyses

To examine whether students can improve their percent accuracy of Japanese case particles after receiving error feedback, target-like use (TLU) scores were calculated (Pica, 1984). TLU analyses were used to measure learners' percent accuracy of Japanese case particles by taking overuse of the target forms into consideration. The Japanese case particles were first scored respectively for correct uses in each obligatory context. These scores then respectively became numerators of ratios whose denominators were the sums of the numbers of obligatory contexts for the language feature and the numbers of nonobligatory contexts in which the language features were supplied inappropriately. An interrater reliability is checked on the TLU analyses and the rate of agreement is about 90%. The following equation shows how the percent accuracy is calculated.

$$\frac{n \text{ correct suppliance in contexts}}{n \text{ obligatory contexts} + n \text{ suppliance in nonobligatory contexts}} \times 100 = \text{percent accuracy}$$

In statistical analyses, descriptive and inferential statistics were performed to show how percent accuracy uses of each targeted language feature vary in terms of pretests and two posttests in two error feedback groups and one content feedback group. Mixed-design repeated measure ANOVA was applied to examine the extent to which focused corrective feedback can successfully treat errors in Japanese case particles.

Results

Students' percent accuracy in three feedback groups during three testing times is depicted in the following Table 2 and Figure 1. The descriptive statistics for the direct feedback is: pretest, $\bar{x}$ = 95.000, SD = 5.621; posttest 1, $\bar{x}$ = 90.166, SD = 8.304; posttest 2, $\bar{x}$ = 83.833, SD = 7.305. The descriptive statistics for the indirect feedback group is: pretest, $\bar{x}$ = 92.500, SD = 11.726; posttest 1, $\bar{x}$ = 83.833, SD = 18.978; posttest 2, $\bar{x}$ = 98.333, SD = 4.082. The descriptive statistics for the content feedback group is: pretest, $\bar{x}$ = 91.000, SD = 8.148; posttest 1, $\bar{x}$ = 92.000, SD = 11.401; posttest 2, $\bar{x}$ = 96.833, SD = 7.756.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Different-correction-group Students' Percent Accuracy in Japanese Case Particles in Different Testing Times

Group		Pretest	Posttest 1	Posttest 2
Direct feedback (n = 6)	Mean	95.000	90.166	83.833
	SD	5.621	8.304	7.305
Indirect feedback (n = 6)	Mean	92.500	83.833	98.333
	SD	11.726	18.978	4.082
Content feedback (n = 6)	Mean	91.000	92.000	96.833
	SD	8.148	11.401	7.756

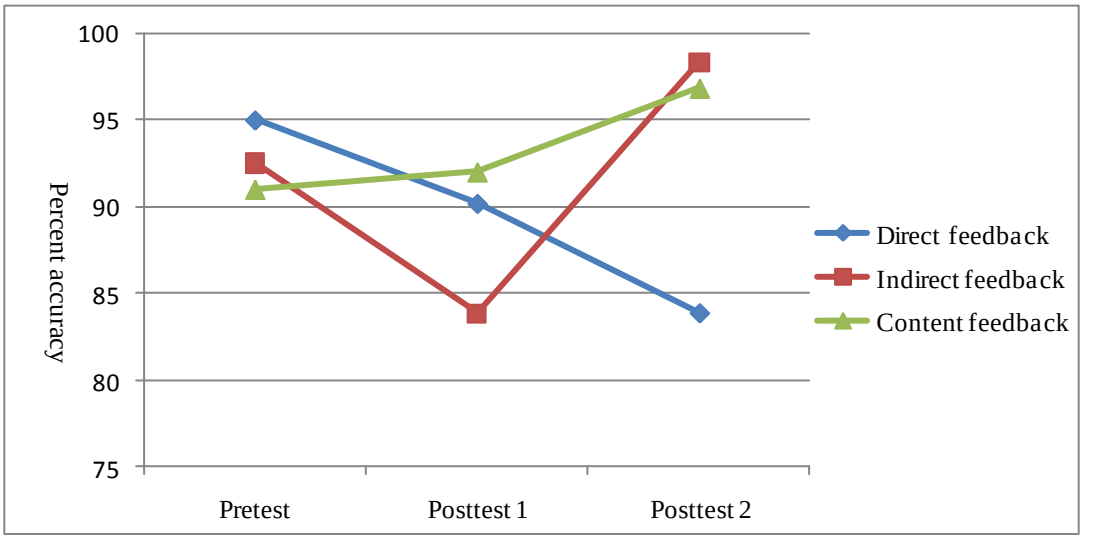

Figure 1. Different-feedback-group Students' Percent Accuracy in Japanese Case Particles in Three Testing Times

Before performing a mixed-design ANOVA, we must confirm whether any factor violates the assumption of homogeneity. Thus, we test the assumption of homogeneity of within-subject and between-subject factors separately.

As to the within-subject factor (testing times), the data passes the Mauchly's Test of Sphercity with a result of .338 ($p > .05$), indicating homogeneity of the data. As for the between-subject factor (feedback group), the data passes the Levene's Test in the pretest ($F = 3.627$; $p = .052$), posttest 1 ($F = 1.597$; $p = .235$), and posttest 2 ($F = 1.066$; $p = .369$), indicating that testing times of the students' accuracy of Japanese case particles do not reach a significant level. Therefore, the analysis of the between-subject factor does not violate the assumptions of homogeneity.

Table 3 shows the summary of Two-way ANOVA of different feedback types and different testing times. A 3 (testing time) x 3 (feedback type) mixed-design full-factorial ANOVA examines the effects of feedback type (direct feedback, indirect feedback and content feedback) and testing time (pretest, posttest 1, and posttest 2) to explain the Japanese case particles; a statistical main effect of

feedback type is not found (F = 0.410, p = > .05, partial eta-squared = .052) and neither does testing time (F = 1.316, p = > .05, partial eta-squared = .081). A statistically significant interaction effect for feedback type and testing time is found (F = 2.773, p > .05, partial eta-squared = .270). The partial eta-squared indicates that this interaction accounts for 27% of the variation in the accuracy percent of Japanese case particles. Furthermore, this interaction indicates that there are differences in accuracy of the Japanese case particles for direct, indirect and content feedback groups in different testing times. Thus, in order to provide a deeper understanding of this result, simple main effects are analyzed.

Table 3. Summary of Two-way ANOVA for Feedback Type and Testing Time

Source of variance	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	η^2
Feedback type（A）	117.444	2	58.722	0.410	.052
Testing time（B）	217.000	2	108.500	1.316	.081
Feedback type*Testing time（A*B）	914.889	4	228.722	2.773*	.270
Within group （Error）	4624.167	45	225.807		
Group area（Between subjects）	2150.056	15	143.337		
Residual	2474.111	30	82.470		
Total	5873.500	53			

* p < .05

Because we have to split the data based on different levels of two different independent variables, simple main effects are examined to compare differences among cells. Thus, before investigating the within-subject and between-subject factor cells, we need to conduct a homogeneity test for all possible combinations of the cells.

In the within-subject factors (testing times), the data passes the Mauchly's Test of Sphercity with a result of 1.953 (p > .05) for direct feedback group, 1.136 (p > .05) for indirect feedback group, 5.611 (p > .05) for content feedback group, indicating homogeneity of the data.

The homogeneity test of between-subject factors (feedback group) conducted based on the different levels of the within-subject factor (testing times) is the same as aforementioned Levene's Test, which shows the results of homogeneity tests of students' accuracy percent of the Japanese case particles in three testing times. We do not show the data again.

A statistically significant difference in the Japanese case particles at different testing times is not found for direct feedback ($F = 3.093$, $p < .05$) indirect feedback ($F = 3.119$, $p < .05$) and content feedback ($F = 0.694$, $p < .05$).

A statistically significant difference in the Japanese case particles for different feedback types is found for the posttest 2 ($F = 8.790$, $p < .05$), but not for pretest ($F = .312$, $p > .05$) and posttest 1 ($F = 0.591$, $p > .05$). Therefore, the analysis of post hoc comparison is run for the posttest 2. Post hoc results show a statistically significant difference in the posttest 2 results for students that received indirect feedback ($\bar{x} = 98.333$) in comparison to those that received direct feedback ($\bar{x} = 83.833$). A similar statistically significant post hoc result was found for the posttest 2 results as well; students that received content feedback ($\bar{x} = 96.833$) statistically significantly outperformed those students that received direct feedback ($\bar{x} = 83.833$).

Table 4. Simple Main Effects Analysis Summary Table for Feedback Type and Testing Time

Variance source	*SS*	*df.*	*MS*	*F*	Post hoc
Testing time（B）					
Direct feedback（a1）	376.333	2	188.167	3.093	
Indirect feedback（a2）	638.778	2	319.389	3.119	
Content feedback（a3）	116.778	2	58.389	0.694	
Feedback type（A）					
Pretest（b1）	49.000	2	24.500	0.312	
Posttest 1（b2）	220.333	2	110.167	0.591	
Posttest 2（b3）	763.000	2	381.500	8.790*	a2 > a1; a3 >

a1

Note: a1 = direct feedback, a2 = indirect feedback, a3 = content feedback; b1 = pretest, b2 = posttest 1, b3 = posttest 2
*$p < .05$

Conclusion and Discussion

The result of the current study is slightly different from previous results in focused feedback studies. It has been found that students who receive direct feedback can increase the accuracy of English article use (Bitchener, 2008; Bitchener & Knoch, 2010; Sheen, 2007). However, the direct feedback group's percent accuracy of the Japanese case particles is not significantly greater than the content feedback group's in their subsequent writings (the posttest 1). The indirect feedback group on the contrary outperforms the direct feedback group in the posttest 2 after two weeks. In addition, there is no significant difference between the indirect feedback group and the content feedback group in terms of their percent accuracy of the Japanese case particle uses. This implies that to offer direct feedback might simply lead students to mechanical drills just like copy and paste without reviewing why the Japanese case particle errors are made. On the contrary, to give indirect feedback involves a deeper information processing. The indirect feedback prompts students to compare different uses of Japanese case particles and finally leads to learning. The benefit of indirect feedback can be observed in the posttest 2 after two weeks. Although the content feedback group does not receive any error feedback, the content feedback significantly outperforms the direct feedback group. Since the use of the Japanese case particle has communicative values in the writing task, students might be able to self-correct their errors by practicing the writing tasks repeatedly. It is suggested that when offering grammar feedback, teachers should take the peculiarity of the targeted language feature in the writing tasks into consideration.

The current study has demonstrated the focused feedback effects on a targeted language feature, the Japanese case particle in a learning task. It is

therefore worthwhile to discuss how to integrate learning tasks with error corrections. Following Li and Chan (2001), we would like to propose the following pedagogical implications. When writing tasks are designed to elicit certain language features and appropriate feedback is given to treat specific error types concerning these language features, correction will work. Some researchers might query which specific error types should be corrected (Truscott, 1996; 2001; Xu, 2009) and worry whether correcting a specific error type will lead to simply focusing on a single language feature in writing as in a Present-Practice-Produce exercise (Bruton, 2009). There are already some suggestions for teachers to consult which specific error types should be selected for corrections such as focusing global errors, frequent errors, errors which have been discussed in class and others (Cohen, 1975; Ferris, 2002; Hendrickson, 1978). The current study claims that error types relevant to writing task demands shall be primarily and can be effectively treated. When specific language features to be focused for corrections have communicative values and are naturally embedded in as well as necessarily elicited by consciousness raising tasks, correction will improve not only students' writing accuracy but also their written communication to satisfy task demands. A consciousness raising task can serve as a meaningful context to help learners aware of certain language features in a communicative task. Once learners make errors relevant to these language features, correction will lead learners in noticing the specified language features in the task where certain language features have been communicatively employed, and become effective in correcting their errors in the task.

Despite the potential contribution of the finding, there are several limitations which should be considered. Since the sample size in the current study is rather small, more students should be recruited to examine the focused feedback effect on Japanese case particles in future studies. In addition, it is also necessary to consider whether certain participants are appropriate for the correction studies. Because

students in the present study seem to possess a good command of the Japanese case particles in the pretest, whether their Japanese case particles requires error feedback deserves second thoughts. In this study, we examine teacher feedback effects on a specified error type. It is also suggested that future researchers can explore the peer feedback effects on a specified error type as well to advance our understanding towards focused feedback.

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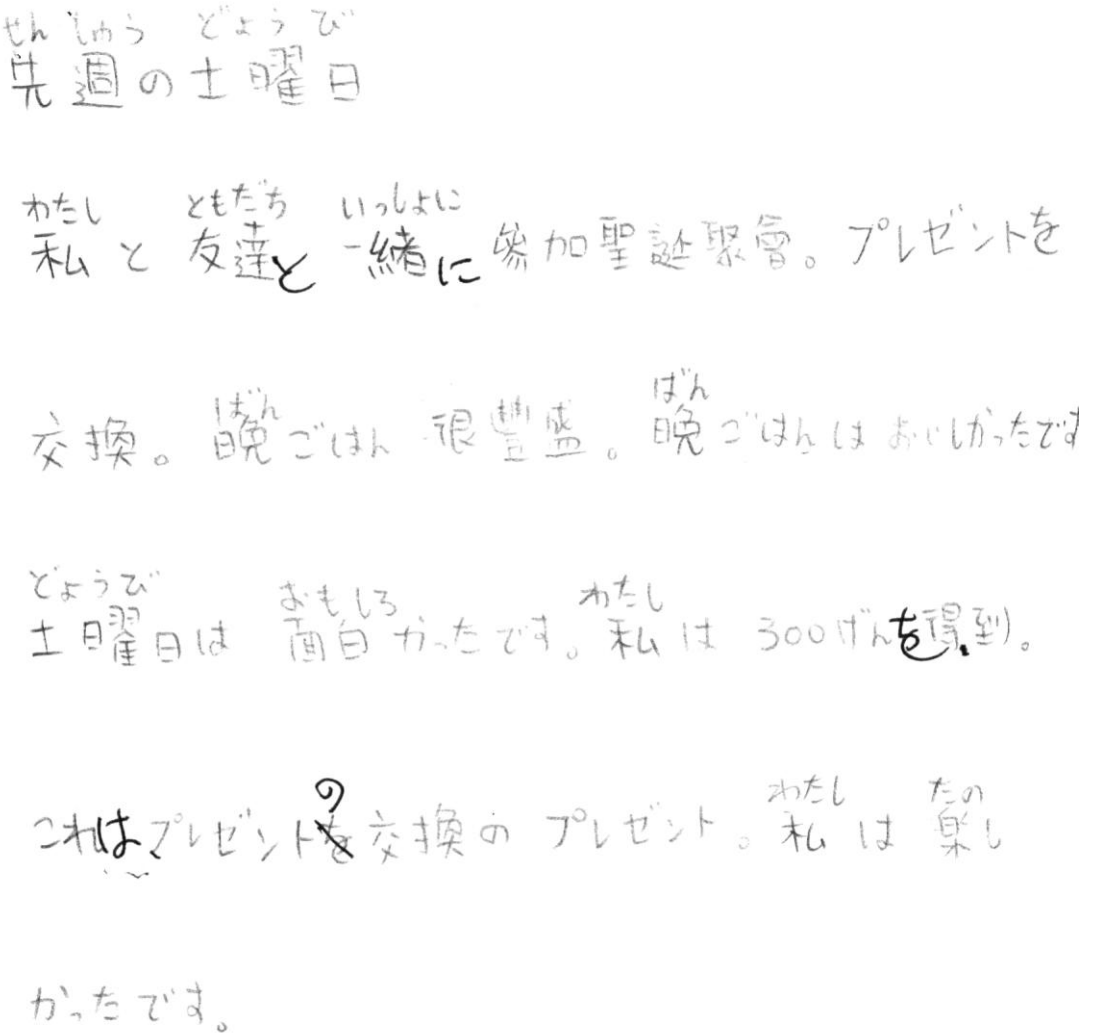
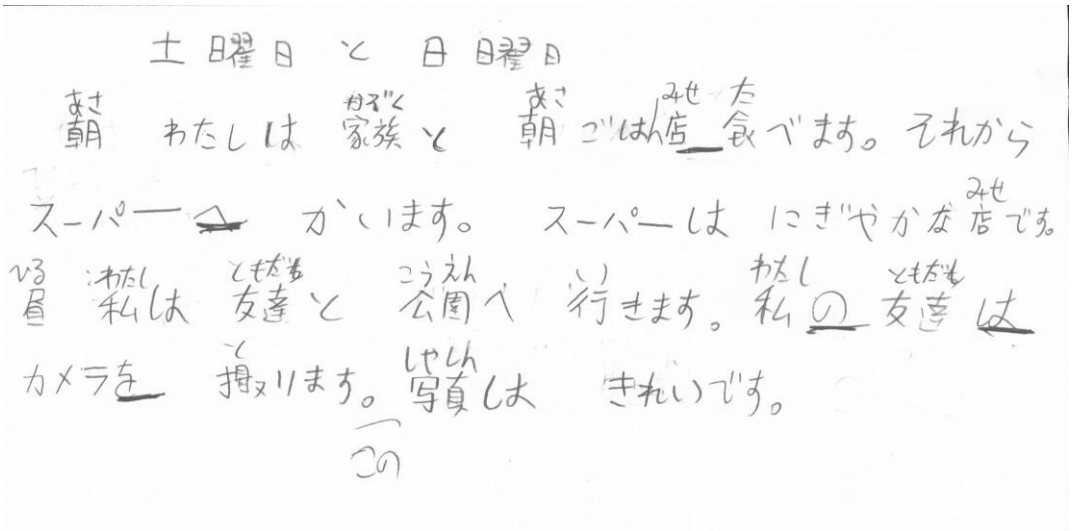
日本語文法整理読本　解説と演習　井口厚夫　井口裕子　1994 バベル　プレス

世界の言語と日本語　角田太作　1991 くろしお出版

Appendix A


先週の土曜日
私と友達と一緒に参加聖誕聚會。プレゼントを
交換。晚ごはん很豐盛。晚ごはんはおいしかったです
土日曜日は面白かったです。私は300げんを還到。
これはプレゼントを交換のプレゼント。私は楽し
かったです。

Appendix B



土曜日と日曜日

朝 わたしは家族と朝ごはん店食べます。それから

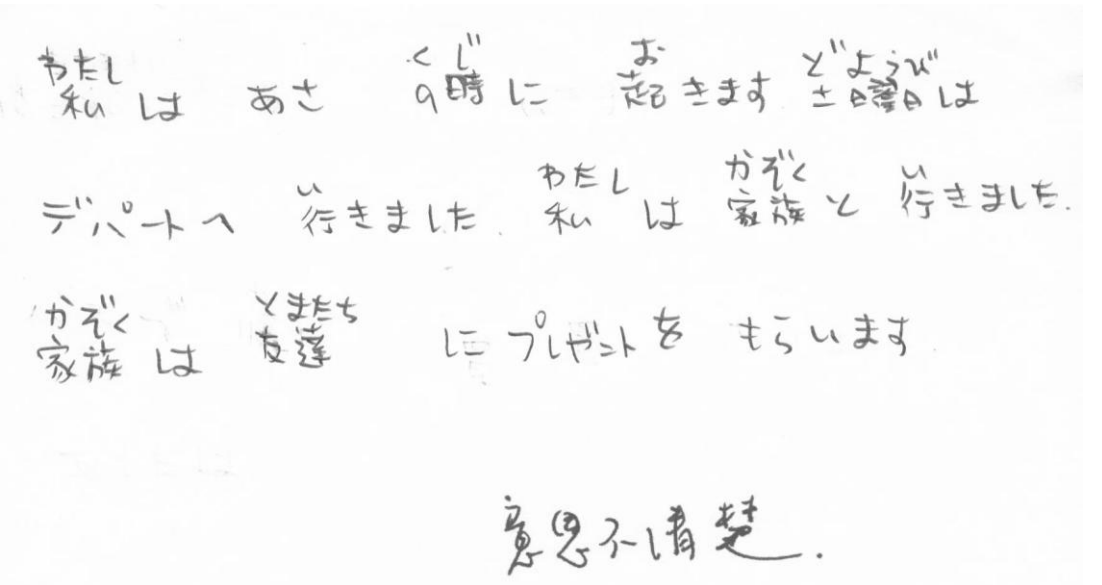
スーパーへ かいます。 スーパーは にぎやかな店です。

昼 私は 友達と 公園へ 行きます。私の友達は

カメラを 撮ります。写真は きれいです。

この

Appendix C



私は あさ の時に 起きます どようび 土曜日は

デパートへ 行きました 私は 家族と 行きました.

家族は 友達 にプレゼントを もらいます

意思不清楚.