English prohibits extraction of *wh*-phrases out of relative clauses. Therefore, it is not possible to form the *wh*-question in (1b) asking about ‘an apple’ in (1a). This is commonly referred to as the Complex NP Constraint, one of the island constraints proposed by Ross (1967). However, in *wh*-in-*situ* languages, which lack overt *wh*-movement in *wh*-questions, such a constraint is not observed. For example, the Japanese counterpart of (1b) is acceptable, as shown in (2b).

Although there has been a claim that island constraints apply at the level of LF, Nishigauchi (1990, 1999) argues that this does not account for Japanese *wh*-questions inside relative clauses, like in (2b); rather, the entire complex NP (indicated with brackets) undergoes covert movement with the *wh*-phrase inside it. This Pied-Piping analysis is supported by the availability of (3a) as a way to answer the question, in addition to (3b), which Nishigauchi analyzes as a truncated form of (3a), available given the right context.

While there have been many L2 studies that investigated whether speakers of *wh*-in-*situ* languages (can) come to know island constraints in the L2 acquisition of *wh*-movement languages (e.g., Bley-Vroman, Felix, & Ioup, 1988), there has been little/no study of the reverse scenario (Belikova & White, 2009). This project therefore investigates the following two Research Questions: (a) whether (adult) L1-English L2ers of Japanese (can) come to know that *wh*-questions like (2b) are acceptable in Japanese, and (b) whether the L2ers (can) come to know how to answer a question like (2b).

Our participants are adult L1-English L2ers of Japanese as well as adult L1-Japanese speakers as controls. The L2 participants are divided into two proficiency groups (“intermediate” and “advanced”) based on their performance on Marsden’s (2004) Japanese cloze test. In the first part of this project, addressing Research Question (a), participants are presented with a context followed by a question, as illustrated in (4). They are then asked to rate the question on a scale of 1 to 5 ranging from ‘very unnatural’ to ‘very natural’ along with a “not sure” option. The stimuli comprise 12 test items with *wh*-questions like (2b), 12 control items with the *yes-no* question counterparts like (2a), and 36 filler items. We predict that lower-level L2ers will initially reject *wh*-questions that involve a complex NP, transferring the Complex NP Constraint from their L1 English, but that higher-level L1-English L2ers will come to know, as their proficiency improves, that these Japanese *wh*-questions are acceptable.

Data collection is ongoing, but pilot results that targeted Research Question (a) showed that 18 intermediate L2ers gave significantly lower ratings to questions like (2b) than to questions like (2a) (viz., 2.45 vs. 4.43), unlike 3 Japanese native speakers who showed no such difference. This indicates that, as predicted, L1-English L2ers do initially reject *in-situ* *wh*-questions with complex NPs. The next step in this research project is to determine how (more advanced) L1-English L2ers of Japanese interpret and, importantly, respond to *wh*-questions like (2b).
Examples
(1) a. Did Taro see a girl [ who bought an apple ]?
   b. * What did Taro see a girl [ who bought <what> ]?
(2) a. Taro-wa [ ringo-o kat-ta onnanoko ]-o mimashi-ta-ka?
       T a r o - T O P a p p l e - A C C b u y - P S T g i r l - A C C s e e - P S T - Q
       ‘Did Taro see a girl [who bought an apple]?’
   b. Taro-wa [ nani-o kat-ta onnanoko ]-o mimashi-ta-ka?
       T a r o - T O P w h a t - A C C b u y - P S T g i r l - A C C s e e - P S T - Q
       ‘What did Taro see a girl [ who bought <what> ]?’
(3) a. [Ringo-o kat-ta onnanoko]-desu.
   b. Ringo-desu.
       [ apple - A C C b u y - P S T g i r l ] - C O P a p p l e - C O P
       ‘(It’s) the girl who bought an apple.’
       ‘(It’s) an apple.’
Sample stimulus
       T a n a k a - H O N - C O N J Y a m a d a - H O N - T O P p r o f e s s o r - C O P
       ‘Mr. Tanaka and Mr. Yamada are professors.’
       Tanaka-san-wa suugaku-o oshie-tei-masu.
       T a n a k a - H O N - W A m a t h - A C C t e a c h - P R O G - P R E S
       ‘Mr. Tanaka teaches mathematics.’
       Yamada-san-wa seibutsugaku-o oshie-tei-masu.
       Y a m a d a - H O N - W A b i o l o g y - A C C t e a c h - P R O G - P R E S
       ‘Mr. Yamada teaches biology.’
       Taro-wa Yamada-san-o sonkeishi-tei-masu.
       T a r o - T O P Y a m a d a - H O N - A C C r e s p e c t - P R O G - P R E S
       ‘Taro respects Mr. Tanaka.’
       Taro-wa [ nani-o oshie-tei-ru kyooju]-o sonkeishi-tei-masu-ka
       T a r o - T O P w h a t - A C C t e a c h - P R O G - P R E S p r o f e s s o r - A C C r e s p e c t - P R O G - P R E S - Q
       ‘What does Taro respect the professor [ who teaches <what> ]?’
References