The purpose of this study is to identify the factors that may affect the acquisition of the English relative constructions (RCs) of Japanese speakers.

Although a considerable number of studies have been made on the second language (L2) acquisition of RCs over the past few decades, it still remains controversial. Many of the studies compare the acquisition order with the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy (NPAH) proposed by Comrie and Keenan (1979), and underpin the NPAH as the best predictor of the acquisition of European languages as L2 (Hyltenstam 1984; Pavesi 1986; Eckman et al. 1988). On the contrary, Ozeki & Shirai (2007) and Kanno (2007) depict contradictory results in L2 acquisition of the Japanese RCs. They advocate the NPAH may not be the dominant predictor, rather animacy has much impact on the acquisition. In addition, Comrie (1998) is aware that what is considered to be the RCs in Japanese and some other Asian languages are actually attributive clauses, i.e., a modifying clause is simply attached to the head noun, and the head noun and the modifying clause involve no grammatical relationship. Comrie suggests that the acceptability depends not on structural factors but on semantic and pragmatic factors in these languages. This study will discuss the validity of these factors and intend to investigate further factors that may affect the acquisition of the English RCs of Japanese learners.