

# Notes on locative inversion and negative inversion in English

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses information structure of English Locative Inversion and Negative Inversion with special reference to the discourse-related notions of Topic and Focus. Even though many previous studies investigate how these constructions serve in the discourse, there is little agreement on whether they are categorized as Topic-fronting constructions or as Focus-fronting ones. In this paper, through scrutinizing some pieces of contextual and grammatical evidence I argue that Locative Inversion is divided into a Topic-fronting type and a Focus-fronting type while Negative Inversion is an instance of Focus-fronting. Furthermore, the presentational function, which has been assumed to belong to Locative Inversion, is actually assigned to Topic-fronting Locative Inversion, not to Focus-fronting one.

**Keywords:** Information structure, Locative Inversion, Negative Inversion

## 1. Introduction

Both Locative Inversion construction (LI) and Negative Inversion construction (NI) in English are one of the information-packaging constructions, which play an important role in the discourse so that we can process linguistic information efficiently and accurately. Typical examples of these constructions are cited below.

(1) *Locative Inversion*

- a. \* Down the street rolled the baby carriage!
- b. In came John!

(Emonds, 1976, p. 29)

(2) *Negative Inversion*

- a. Under no condition may they leave the area.
- b. Only on weekends did I see those students.

(Emonds, 1976, p. 28)

In LI, as in (1), locative PPs are preposed and inversion takes place between subjects and main verbs. NI sentences such as (2) also contain inversion of subjects and auxiliaries with negative elements preposed to the sentence-initial position. These constructions have been studied by many researchers for a long time (cf. Bowers (1976), Coopmans (1989), Rochemont and Culicover (1990), Culicover (1992), Bresnan (1994), Haegeman (2000), Honda (2019)), but their detailed information structure is still a little unclear, as I will review in the next section. This paper therefore investigates the two discourse-related inversion constructions, LI and NI, in terms of their information structure.

Before going on to a detailed discussion, let us briefly overview the definition of Topic and Focus, which are the key notions in analyzing LI and NI.

- (3) Topic is the entity that a speaker identifies about which then information, the comment, is given. (Krifka, 2008, p. 265)
- (4) Focus indicates the presence of alternatives that are relevant for the interpretation of linguistic expressions. (Krifka, 2008, p. 247)

As shown in (3), Topic is roughly defined as “what the sentence is about”, and is often paraphrased with the metaphor of a card filing system: the speaker puts a card on the top of the relevant file of cards. Because in many cases such a card (i.e., the referent of Topic) is selected from those already introduced into the discourse, Topic tends to (not needs to) correspond to old information in the sentence. Meanwhile, Focus is understood in terms of invoking relevant alternatives, as in (4), and this is well-instantiated by the part of an answer to *wh*-questions, which corresponds to *wh*-phrases in the questions (e.g., *What did John eat? – He ate [the CAKE]<sub>Focus</sub>*). Therefore, Focus is often related to new information in the discourse, although not always.

This paper is organized as follows. Section 2 briefly overviews some previous studies dealing with LI and NI, and shows that opinions vary widely on their information structure. In Section 3, then, by scrutinizing some pieces of contextual and syntactic evidence I argue that LI is divided into a Topic-fronting type and a Focus-fronting type while NI is categorized as a Focus-fronting construction. It is also proposed in the section that Topic-fronting LI, not Focus-fronting LI, is associated with the presentational function. Lastly Section 4 provides a brief conclusion and some remaining issues.

## 2. Previous Studies

LI and NI have been the subject of research for a long time, but their information structure is still unclear. In particular, there is little agreement on whether LI is a Topic-fronting construction or a Focus-fronting construction, to my knowledge.

For example, Bresnan (1994) argues that the preposed locative PPs in LI have a topical nature based on at least two pieces of evidence. First, the PPs in LI behave like topicalized phrases in that preposing them rescues the sentences which are ungrammatical otherwise.

- (5) a. \* He didn't think of [that he might be wrong].  
 b. [That he might be wrong] he didn't think of *t*. [Topic fronting]  
 (Bresnan, 1994, p. 106)
- (6) a. \* I expect [on this wall] to be hung a portrait of our founder.  
 b. [On this wall] I expect *t* to be hung a portrait of our founder. [LI]  
 (Bresnan, 1994, pp. 108–109)

The sentences in (5) indicate that *that*-clauses cannot follow prepositions such as *of*, but preposing the clause through Topic fronting improves the grammaticality of the sentence. In the same way, some bizarre LI sentences like (6a) are rendered grammatical if locative PPs are preposed to the topic position, as shown in (6b). This implies that the sentence-initial PPs in LI are preposed in the same way as in Topic-fronting constructions. Second, PPs in LI are incompatible with non-finite clauses. See the following examples.

- (7) a. I expect that John, you won't like. [Topic fronting]  
 b. \* I expect for John, you not to like.  
 c. \* I anticipated John, your not liking.  
 (Bresnan, 1994, p. 107)
- (8) a. I expect that on this wall will be hung a picture of Leonard Pabbs. [LI]  
 b. \* I expect for on this wall to be hung a picture of Leonard Pabbs.  
 c. \* I anticipated on this wall being a picture.  
 (Bresnan, 1994, p. 108)

It is known that Topic fronting cannot occur in non-finite clauses, as shown in (7). LI is also incompatible with non-finite clauses including *to*-infinitives like (8b) and gerundives like (8c). By this is entailed that the preposed locative PPs in LI are in a topic position. Based on these pieces of evidence, Bresnan (1994) concludes that LI is an instance of Topic fronting.

On the other hand, Honda (2019) is one of the works which analyze LI as an instance of Focus fronting. One piece of evidence comes from the phonological property of LI. As illustrated below, Focus fronting such as in (9b) is known to lack the comma intonation break after the fronted focus phrases, and Honda (2019) indicates that LI shows the same pattern.

- (9) a. To Robin, I gave a book. [Topic fronting]  
 b. To ROBIN I gave a book. [Focus fronting]  
 (Culicover, 1992, p. 248)
- (10) a. ... and in 5, 10, or 15 seconds ..., out'll come your answer.  
 b. And as their load seems to get lighter, down'll come a cold hard rain.  
 (Honda, 2019, p. 84)

As indicated in (10), the auxiliaries in LI can be contracted. This means that there is no comma intonation after the preposed locative PPs and confirms the focal nature of LI.

In spite of such discrepancy in the information structure of LI, most previous studies analyze NI as an instance of Focus fronting. Nakamura (1994), for example, points out that the preposed negative phrases in NI are not followed by the comma intonation break. Note that in the following examples the percent signs indicate an intonational pause.

- (11) a. ?\*Nowhere % does he mention my book.  
 b. ?\*In no case % can such a course be justified merely by success.  
 (Büring, 2004, p. 3)

The above data shows that in NI there is no comma intonation break after the preposed negative phrases. As indicated previously in (9), such a phonological property is characteristic of Focus fronting. The focal nature of the preposed negative phrases in NI is further confirmed by the restriction on their relative word order: negative phrases cannot precede the fronted topicalized phrases. See the following pair of sentences.

- (12) a. Bill, at no time has John taken money from.  
 b. \* At no time, Bill, has John taken money from.  
 (Nakamura, 1994, p. 162)

The above restriction on the word order of the topicalized phrase *Bill* and the negative phrase *at no time* implies that the latter occupies the structural position lower than the former does. This strengthens the proposal that the negative phrases in NI move to a focus position.

### 3. Information Structure

#### 3.1 Proposals

The proposals of this paper is as follows: (i) the preposed locative PPs in LI are interpreted as a Topic in one case and as a Focus in the other case; and (ii) the fronted negative phrases in NI are a Focus, which especially has the function of emphasizing the polarity of the sentences. In other words, I argue that LI is divided into a Topic-fronting type and a Focus-fronting type while NI is an instance of Focus fronting with so-called polarity focus.

It is worth mentioning that the division of LI into a Topic-fronting type and a Focus-fronting one is reminiscent of the distinction made by Culicover and Levine (2001). They provide the examples cited below as (13) and point out that LI can be divided into two types.

- (13) a. \* In the room slept Robin.  
 b. In the room slept fitfully the students in the class who had heard about the social psych experiment that we were about to perpetrate.  
 (Culicover and Levine, 2001, p. 293)

It is widely known that LI is incompatible with unergative verbs such as *sleep*, as indicated by the ungrammaticality of the sentence in (13a). However, as shown in (13b), LI sentences with unergatives are rescued when the inverted subject DPs in the postverbal positions are heavy. This contrast leads them to assume that there are two types of LI, “light inversion” and “heavy inversion”. According to them, the verbs which occur in light inversion are restricted to unaccusatives. On the other hand, in

heavy inversion, verbs besides unaccusatives are available but the postverbal DPs should be heavy in the sense of Heavy NP Shift.

- (14) Into the room walked Robin. [light inversion] (Culicover and Levine, 2001, p. 292)  
 (15) In the enclosure, among the chicks, hopped the most recent children of Nepomuk and Snow White. [heavy inversion] (Culicover and Levine, 2001, p. 291)

Here I argue that this distinction on LI suggested by Culicover and Levine (2001) corresponds to the two types of LI in my proposal, Topic-fronting LI and Focus-fronting LI. More specifically, what they call light inversion is correspondent to Topic-fronting LI and heavy inversion is to Focus-fronting LI. If this is so, it follows that the inverted verbs in Topic-fronting LI must be unaccusatives and Focus-fronting LI always contains heavy DPs in the postverbal positions. In the next section, I provide some pieces of evidence supporting my proposal that LI whose main verbs are restricted to unaccusatives is an instance of Topic fronting while LI with heavy postverbal DPs and NI are categorized as Focus-fronting constructions.

### 3.2 Evidence

The proposal mentioned in the previous section is supported by some pieces of evidence, which are from the appropriate contexts for the relevant constructions, weak crossover effects, island effects, and (non-)D-linked *wh*-questions. In what follows, let us consider them one by one.

First, it is reported that the PPs (or their referents) in Topic-fronting LI should appear in the preceding contexts while there are no such restrictions in Focus-fronting LI and NI. The following examples are the instances of Topic-fronting LI (or light inversion in Culicover and Levine's (2001) terms) and shows that the PPs represent old information in the discourse.

- (16) He unscrews *the plate* and removes it from the door. Behind *the plate* is a chiselled cavity. (Mikami, 2010, p. 301)  
 (17) Who ran into the forest?  
 a. Into the forest ran Robin Hood.  
 b. Robin Hood ran into the forest. (Rochemont, 1986, p. 111)  
 (18) Where did Robin Hood run?  
 a. \* Into the forest ran Robin Hood.  
 b. Robin Hood ran into the forest. (Rochemont, 1986, p. 112)

The sentence in (16) indicates that the referent of the preposed locative PP *the plate* is already introduced into the discourse by the preceding sentence. The contrast in (17) and (18) also shows that the information denoted by the preposed PPs should be given in the preceding contexts. By this is meant that the PPs in Topic-fronting LI must convey old information. Given that old information is often associated with the notion of Topic, it follows that the PPs in this construction function as a Topic, which supports my proposal.

On the other hand, in Focus-fronting LI, which I argue is a Focus-fronting construction, the preposed locative PPs convey new information. Consider first the following sentences. Note here that they are categorized as what Culicover and Levine (2001) call heavy inversion since their inverted verbs are unergatives.

- (19) a. They left the top of the mountain and plunged into the shadow of the March night trees. *Black across the clouds flapped the cormorant, screaming as it plummeted downward and disappeared into the woods.* (Levin and Rappaport Hovav, 1995, p. 226)  
 b. "Where can Gardis have got to?" Lady Fairfax was murmuring. "It really is extraordinary. Let her out of your sight for one minute ..." / "Car's here, Lady Fairfax," and *up the stairs bounded Gardis, all secretarial efficiency and smiles.* (*Here Be Dragons*, 1956, p. 19)

Both in (19a) and (19b), the referents of the preposed locative PPs, a cloud and stairs, do not appear in the preceding discourse, which indicates that the PPs in Focus-fronting LI convey new information. A similar conclusion is reached by the following examples.

- (20) a. ##On the third floor worked two young women called Maryanne Thomson and Ava Brent, who ran the audio library and print room.  
 (Levin and Rappaport Hovav, 1995, p. 224)  
 b. ##In every mind suddenly danced images of love: ears, hands, buttocks, thighs and mouths whirled about them like leaves in a spring gale, ...  
 (Erdmann, 1990, p. 46)

Each LI sentence in (20) is used at the beginning of paragraphs, as indicated by the double hash signs, and therefore is not based on any presupposed or shared information. Note that the sentences of Topic-fronting LI such as in (21) cannot appear in such an environment.

- (21) \* ##In comes a unicorn. (Chen, 2003, p. 5)

This leads us to assume that the preposed PPs in Focus-fronting LI as in (20) carry new information (i.e., a focus interpretation), so that it is best analyzed as Focus fronting.

NI is also a Focus-fronting construction. This assumption is supported by the question-answer pairs cited below as (22) and (23).

- (22) Q: Did you see anyone?  
 A: No, not a single person did I see.  
 (23) Q: Who visits Robin on very few occasions?  
 A: \* On very few occasions does Leslie visit Robin.  
 (Culicover, 1992, p. 247)

The above contrast suggests that the preposed negative phrases in NI serve as new information. Since this is one of the defining characteristics of Focus, we can conclude that NI can be categorized as Focus fronting. Here I assume following Honda (2019) that NI especially relates to polarity focus. This assumption is borne out by the following example.

- (24) Q: Who did you see?  
 A: # No, not a single person did I see.  
 (Honda, 2019, p. 114)

The above data indicates that NI cannot serve as an answer to *wh*-questions such as in (24) while it can be one to *yes/no*-questions, as shown in (22). By this is meant that NI emphasizes the negative polarity of the sentences, which is known as polarity focus.

The second evidence for my proposal that LI is divided into a Topic-fronting type and a Focus-fronting one and NI is an instance of Focus fronting comes from their syntactic behavior relating to weak crossover effects. It is worth noting here that the presence or absence of this effect can be a diagnostic for Topic/Focus fronting.

- (25) a. Robin<sub>i</sub>, his<sub>i</sub> mother really appreciates. [Topic fronting]  
 b. \* ROBIN<sub>i</sub> his<sub>i</sub> mother really appreciates. [Focus fronting]  
 (Culicover, 1992, p. 252)

As shown in (25) above, Topic phrases can be preposed over the coindexed pronoun, but Focus phrases cannot. In short, weak crossover effect is only exhibited in Focus fronting, not in Topic fronting. With this in mind, let us see the following example, which is introduced as light inversion by Culicover and Levine (2001) and therefore an instance of Topic-fronting LI.

- (26) Into every dog<sub>i</sub>'s cage peered its<sub>i</sub> owner. (Culicover and Levine, 2001, p. 289)

In (26), the locative PP *Into every dog's cage* is fronted across the pronominal possessive determiner *its*, with which the DP *dog* in the preposed PP is coindexed. The grammaticality of this sentence shows that in Topic-fronting LI there is no weak crossover effect. This confirms the topical nature of this construction.

The examples of Focus-fronting LI and NI, on the other hand, suggests precisely the opposite. See the following sentences.

- (27) \* In every dog<sub>i</sub>'s cage hung on a hook its<sub>i</sub> most attractive and expensive collar.  
 (Culicover and Levine, 2001, p. 290)
- (28) \* No book<sub>i</sub> would I expect its<sub>i</sub> author to praise *t<sub>i</sub>* publicly. (Koizumi, 1995, p. 143)

(27) is an instance of Focus-fronting LI, and (28) is that of NI. In both examples, preposing the locative PP and the negative phrase renders the sentences ungrammatical. This fact can be explained by assuming that both constructions are instances of Focus fronting, unlike the case of (26), Topic-fronting LI.

The third evidence supporting my proposal is concerned with island effects. As shown below, it is sensitive to the distinction between Topic/Focus fronting whether or not a preposed element creates a syntactic island.

- (29) a. \* When did he say that into the room Jack walked? [Topic fronting]  
 (Rizzi and Shlonsky, 2006, p. 344)
- b. What did Lee say that to ROBIN she gave? [Focus fronting]  
 (Culicover, 1992, p. 250)

In (29a), an instance of Topic fronting, the *wh*-phrase cannot be extracted out from the embedded clause applied Topic fronting, because the fronted topic phrase *into the room* creates a syntactic island called topic island. In Focus fronting in (29b), meanwhile, there are no such island effects and therefore *wh*-extraction from the clause with Focus fronting is possible. To return now to the case of LI and NI, it is revealed that Topic-fronting LI exhibits islands effects while Focus-fronting LI and NI do not.

- (30) ?\*What kind of mushrooms do you think on these trails can be found? [Topic-fronting LI]  
 (Bresnan, 1994, p. 87)
- (31) In which park did John say that under the tree stood a man who had an appointment with Mary? [Focus-fronting LI] (Culicover, 1992, p. 251)
- (32) Which books did Lee say that only to Robin will she give? [NI]  
 (Culicover, 1992, p. 218)

In (30), the *wh*-phrase *What kind of mushrooms* cannot be extracted out from the embedded clause in which Topic-fronting LI occurs since the preposed locative PP creates a topic island. However, the grammaticality can be improved if the postverbal DPs are relatively heavy, as in (31): in Focus-fronting LI, island effects are not exhibited when the locative PPs are preposed. Neither do the preposed negative phrases in NI create an island and therefore *wh*-extraction is possible, as shown in (32). This series of data all confirm the topical nature of Topic-fronting LI and the focal nature of Focus-fronting LI and NI.

Lastly, let us consider the evidence from (non-)D-linked *wh*-questions, even though this is not so strong compared to others. As is well known, D-linked *wh*-phrases increase the acceptability of the sentences with extraction from *wh*-islands.

- (33) a. ??What<sub>i</sub> were you wondering how to fix *t<sub>i</sub>*? [non-D-linked]  
 b. Which car<sub>i</sub> were you wondering how to fix *t<sub>i</sub>*? [D-linked]  
 (Kroch, 1998, p. 24)

In (33a), extraction of the non-D-linked *wh*-phrase *What* is impossible because of the presence of the island. On the other hand, the D-linked *wh*-phrase *Which car* in (33b) is extractable from the *wh*-island. Following Rizzi (2001), Endo (2007) explains this asymmetry by assuming that non-D-linked *wh*-phrases form a focus chain while D-linked ones create a topic chain. Therefore D-linked *wh*-phrases

and non-D-linked *wh*-phrases form a different kind of chain, so that they cannot be a possible candidate for movement to each other in terms of the Relativized Minimality Principle. What should be emphasized here is that non-D-linked elements form a focus chain and D-linked ones do a topic chain. With this in mind, let us consider the following examples, which are introduced as instances of light inversion by Culicover and Levine (2001).

- (34) a. \* Where live all your relatives? [non-D-linked]  
 b. In which city live all your relatives? [D-linked]  
 (Culicover and Levine, 2001, p. 304)

The above contrast shows that only D-linked *wh*-phrases, not non-D-linked ones, can be used as an interrogative locative PP in Topic-fronting LI. Given that D-linked elements form a topic chain, it follows that the locative PPs in this construction are preposed through the operation of Topic fronting. Notice here that Focus-fronting LI and NI are compatible with non-D-linked phrases.

- (35) ? Where for the most of the year live all of your most favorite relatives?  
 [Focus-fronting LI] (*ibid.*)  
 (36) Not a bite did he eat. [NI] (Tanaka, 1997, p. 118)

As shown in (35) and (36), both Focus-fronting LI with the non-D-linked *wh*-phrase *Where* and NI with the non-D-linked phrase *Not a bite* are acceptable. This leads us to conclude that both of them are best analyzed as Focus-fronting constructions, which confirms my proposal.

So far, we have discussed some pieces of evidence for my proposal. Through the examination of them it is confirmed that one type of LI corresponding to light inversion in Culicover and Levine's (2001) terms (i.e., Topic-fronting LI) is categorized as a Topic-fronting construction while the other type of LI corresponding to heavy inversion (i.e., Focus-fronting LI) and NI are categorized as Focus-fronting constructions.

### 3.3 The Presentational Function of Locative Inversion

Before concluding this section, let us delve into the information structure of the two types of LI in more detail, especially focusing on the presentational function of the constructions.

In the first place, LI has been argued to have the function of introducing on the scene the referents of the postverbal DPs and presenting them as new information, which is known as the presentational function. This is confirmed by the following data.

- (37) I'm looking for my friend Rose.  
 a. # Among the guests of honor was sitting Rose.  
 b. Rose was sitting among the guests of honor.  
 (Bresnan, 1994, p. 85)  
 (38) a. \* Rose<sub>i</sub>? Among the guests of honor was sitting she<sub>i</sub>/her<sub>i</sub>.  
 b. Among the guests of honor was sitting HER. [pointing]  
 (Bresnan, 1994, p. 86)

The answer in (37a) is awkward since the referent of the inverted DP, *Rose*, is already mentioned in the preceding contexts and therefore incompatible with the presentational function of LI. (38a) also indicates that the postverbal subject position cannot be occupied by anaphoric pronouns because of the presentational function. The oddness of the sentence can be improved when the postverbal pronoun is interpreted as a deictic one, as in (38b).

Here I argue that this presentational function is assigned to Topic-fronting LI, not to Focus-fronting LI. Furthermore, the restriction on the verbs occurring in Topic-fronting LI is ascribed to this function. Among researchers it is generally accepted that the verbs appearing in the construction with the presentational function must be those carrying relatively light information (i.e., no new information) (cf. Birner (1994, p. 254) and Nakau (1994, p. 373)). Given that unaccusative verbs are informationally light in many cases, it is quite natural that the verbs in Topic-fronting LI are restricted to unaccusatives.

This assumption that the verbs in Topic-fronting LI should be “light” because of its presentational function is further strengthened by the following examples.

- (39) a. Voluntarily/Deliberately John walked out of the room.  
 b. \* Voluntarily/Deliberately out of the room walked John.  
 (Kuwabara, 1994, p. 192)
- (40) a. In that field were executed dozens of partisans.  
 b. \* In that field got executed dozens of partisans.  
 (Postal, 2004, p. 46)
- (41) a. Among the guests of honor was seated my mother.  
 b. ??Among the guests of honor was seated my mother by my friend Rose.  
 (Bresnan, 1994, p. 78)

As in (39), the sentences of Topic-fronting LI are rendered ungrammatical when intentional adverbs such as *voluntarily* and *deliberately* are involved. In a similar vein, the contrast in (40) shows that Topic-fronting LI is incompatible with *get*-passives, which are usually used for describing an action rather than a state. Furthermore, even in *be*-passives, *by*-phrases denoting the agent of an event cannot appear in the construction, as shown in (41). All of these examples suggest that their verbs carry “heavy” information because of their volitional, active, or agentive properties, and that such heavy information is not compatible with the presentational function of Topic-fronting LI.

This line of reasoning leads us to predict that Focus-fronting LI does not have the presentational function, unlike Topic-fronting one. This prediction is borne out by the following contrast in sentential negation.

- (42) a. \* On this wall will not hang a picture of U. S. Grant. [Topic-fronting LI]  
 b. On the wall hangs not a picture of U. S. Grant but one of Jefferson Davis.  
 (Aissen, 1975, p. 9)
- (43) Into the room didn’t walk any of the most interesting people that she had met at the party.  
 [Focus-fronting LI] (Rochemont and Culicover, 1990, p. 107)

As in (42), only a constituent, not a whole sentence, can be negated in Topic-fronting LI. According to Rochemont and Culicover (1990), however, sentence negation becomes possible when the inverted DPs are heavy (i.e., Focus-fronting LI), as indicated by (43). If the exclusion of negation of a whole sentence in Topic-fronting LI is attributed to the presentational function of the construction, it follows that Focus-fronting LI lacks such a function and does not present the referents of the postverbal DPs to the hearer. Thus besides the difference in the informational status of the preposed locative PPs (a Topic in Topic-fronting LI and a Focus in Focus-fronting LI), they have different informational functions as a whole: the former has the presentational function but the latter does not.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

Until today, many studies have been devoted to investigating LI and NI, but there is little agreement on their information structure. In particular, some researchers argue that LI is an instance of Topic fronting while others analyze it as a Focus-fronting construction. In this paper, through scrutinizing some contextual and syntactic diagnostics, I have concluded that both claims are true in a sense: LI is actually divided into a Topic-fronting type, which is restricted to unaccusative verbs, and a Focus-fronting type, whose postverbal subject DPs must be heavy in the sense of Heavy NP Shift. It is also confirmed that NI is an instance of Focus fronting with polarity focus, as pointed out by some of the previous studies. Under this categorization, the referents of the postverbal DPs in Topic-fronting LI are newly presented on the stage already provided by the preposed locative PPs (i.e., presentational function).

#### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Nobuhiro Kaga, who is my principal academic advisor, and all the people who made some comments on my study at the poster presentation session.



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