

Japanese Passives with Verbal Nouns

Category: formal syntax

The purpose of this paper is to (i) present a set of Japanese constructions with verbal nouns (VNs) that exhibit typical characteristics of passivization, albeit without the passive morpheme *rare*, and (ii) to characterize them in terms of (a) Transitivity (Hopper & Thompson 1980) and (b) the type of agent phrases.

i) Passive Tests: Ono (1997) and Kageyama (1993) have pointed out that transitive VNs (which, as shown in (1a), only take a patient (or theme) argument in the accusative, but not nominative, when followed by *suru* ‘do’) do allow their patient to occur in the nominative (or as a subject) when followed by an element such as *tyuu* ‘during’ and (*no*) *sai* ‘occasion.’ Sato (2008) has argued that transitive VNs followed by the copula *da* similarly allow their patient to appear as a subject, as well as an object, as in (1b). (Here VNs in question will be highlighted in small upper case. VN-*da* sentences may sound rather marginal and hence need to be marked with a ‘?’ for some speakers; the following examples, however, are modified versions of actually occurring data.)

- (1) a. *Keisatu ga hannin o/*ga TAIHO sita.* b. ... *hannin o/ga TAIHO da soo-da.*
 Police Nom offender Acc/Nom arrest did offender Acc/Nom arrest Cop I-heard
 ‘The police arrested the offender.’ ‘I heard (they) arrested the offender/the offender was arrested.’

Inserting a reflexive, e.g. *zibun no syokuba de* ‘at self’s workplace,’ after *hannin* ‘offender’ in (1a,b) shows that coreference between *hannin* and *zibun* is possible only when the former (*hannin*) occurs in the nominative in (1b). This supports the view that the nominative NP in (1b) is a subject. (Replacing *da soo-da* ‘Cop I-heard’ with *tyuu* or *no sai* exhibits the same effect.) Moreover, those constructions with VNs pass tests of passives.

First, just like other bona fide passives, the implied agent of passives with VNs can control a rationale clause. The PRO subject of the rationale clause (the preventer) in (2) can be construed as the suppressed agent of the VN in the passive, i.e., someone who arrested the suspect, which can be made overt by inserting *keisatu niyotte* ‘by the police.’ In contrast, the PRO subject of the rationale clause in (3) can only be construed as someone referred to by the matrix clause subject, the self-surrenderer.

- (2) [PRO *Syooko-inmetu o husegu tame-ni*] *yoogisya ga TAIHO da nante...*
 evidence-destruction Acc prevent for suspect Nom arrest Cop that
 ‘(it’s surprising) that the suspect was arrested to prevent destruction of evidence’

- (3) [PRO *Syooko-inmetu o husegu tame-ni*] *yoogisya ga ZISYU da nante...*
 evidence-destruction Acc prevent for suspect Nom surrender Cop that
 ‘(it’s surprising) that the suspect surrendered himself to prevent destruction of evidence’

The contrast (i.e., the control of the rationale clause agent by the suppressed agent, rather than by the matrix subject in (2) vs. its control by the matrix subject in (3)) is due to the difference in transitivity; i.e., *taiho* is transitive whereas *zisyu* is intransitive. (Replacing the unergative VN *zisyu* ‘self-surrender’ in (3) with the unaccusative VN *sissoo* ‘disappearing’ does not allow an outside agent to control the rationale clause, either.) The same contrast obtains if *da nante* in (2) and (3) is replaced by *no ori* or *tyuu*.

Secondly, as shown in (4), the transitive VN *syootai* ‘inviting’ allows its patient to occur in the nominative with its numeral quantifier (NQ) floated away from it; the NQ *3-nin* immediately to the left of the VN in (4) can be construed as modifying sentence-initial *seizika* ‘politicians.’ This suggests that there is a trace of *seizika* immediately to the left of the VN that can mutually c-command the NQ (Miyagawa 1989). (The posited empty category coreferential with *seizika* in (4) cannot be pro, because substituting *zibuntati(-zisin)-o* ‘themselves’ for the empty category in (4) renders the sentence ungrammatical.) On the other hand, *syusaisya* ‘organizer’ in the nominative in (5), which bears an agent role and occurs away from the NQ, cannot be associated with it. The same contrast (i.e., the NQ coreferential with the nominative NP in (4) vs. the NQ not coreferential with the nominative NP in (5)) obtains if *da soo-da* in (4) and (5) is replaced by *no sai* or *tyuu*.

- (4) *Seizika_i ga syusaisya niyotte sono paatii ni 3-nin_i t_i SYOOTAI da soo-desu.*
 politician Nom organizer by that party to 3-people inviting Cop I-heard
 ‘I heard three politicians were invited to the party by the organizer.’

- (5) *Seizika_i o syusaisya_j ga sono paatii ni 3-nin_{i/*j} t_i SYOOTAI da soo-desu.*
 politician Acc organizer Nom that party to 3-people inviting Cop I-heard
 ‘I heard that the organizer invited three politicians to the party.’

Thirdly, Fukuda (2006) has pointed out a contrast in scope ambiguity, which obtains in case of the *niyotte* passive, but not in case of the *ni* direct passive, in (6), due to some type of movement from an object to a subject position in the former (*niyotte* passive) and lack thereof in the latter (*ni* direct passive): i.e., (a) vs. (b).

- (6) *3-nin no gakusei ga Ito-sensei niyotte/ni maikai sas-are-ta.*
 3-people Gen student Nom Ito-prof. by/by every-time call-Pass-Past

‘Three students were called on by Prof. Ito every time.’ (Fukuda’s (2006) examples in (10a,b), p. 91)

(a) *niyotte* passive {3 > every, every > 3}; (b) *ni* direct passive {3 > every, *every > 3}

The same scope ambiguity as in (6a) obtains with a VN followed by a copula (as well as by *no ori* or *tyuu*) in (7), which suggests that it involves a similar type of movement. (Because a *ni* agent phrase lowers the acceptability of (7), only the example with *niyotte* is given. This point will be elaborated shortly.)

(7) *3-nin no gakusei ga gakutyoo niyotte mai-gakki SYOOTAI da soo desu.*
 3-people Gen students Nom president by every-semester inviting Cop I-heard
 ‘I heard that three students are invited by the president every semester.’ {3 > every, every > 3}

ii) **Characteristic a Transitivity:** Ono (1997) characterized that causative VNs with a complex Event Structure undergo the externalization of internal arguments. But a result of survey on 461 transitive VNs using the Google search engine has revealed that transitive VNs that appear in passive constructions denote (8).

(8) An event in which some agent volitionally does some action which has an end point such that the patient is totally affected, that is, high on the Transitivity scale (Hopper & Thompson 1980); and the patient comes to be in one of the following states: (a) existing (from non-existing) or available, (b) selected or designated as having some property, (c) positioned at or moved to some place, (d) sought or forced to be carried out, or (e) some other salient resultant state.

An affected patient situated in a salient resultant state probably allows it to assume a higher degree of ‘discourse relevance’ (Shibatani 2006). VNs followed by *no sai* or *tyuu* in passive constructions are also confined to those that denote (8). (In the above survey I conducted, 68 of 461 VNs, 15%, were found in the passive, while 387 VNs, 84%, were found in the active, or taking an *o*-marked argument, when followed by the copula *da*.) Structurally, I assume, a VN phrase headed by a transitive VN that denotes (8) has options of merging with *da* or *su(ru)* (inserted under *v* with [+case]), which realizes all arguments of the VN, resulting in a transitive structure, or merging with another variant of *da* (with [-case] under *v*) that realizes all but suppressed arguments, resulting in a passive structure. The latter option is possible due to its unaccusative property.

Characteristic b the type of agent phrases: Passive constructions presented above show an interesting behavior of the *ni* agent phrase. That is, although the agent phrase in those passive constructions with VNs can be followed by *niyotte*, their acceptability degrades when *ni* follows instead, as shown in (10)-(12).

(9) *Sono kyoozyu ga keisatu niyotte/ni TAIHO sareta.*
 that professor Nom police by/by arrest was-done
 ‘That professor was arrested by the police.’

(10) *Sono kyoozyu ga keisatu niyotte/?*ni TAIHO da nante* (Cop ‘that’)

(11) *Sono kyoozyu ga keisatu niyotte/?*ni TAIHO tyuu* (‘during’)

(12) *Sono kyoozyu ga keisatu niyotte/?*ni TAIHO no sai* (‘occasion’)

The above contrast (between the sentences with *ni* and *niyotte* in (10)-(12)), although subtle, indicates that *ni* marking an agent phrase is not necessarily intrinsic to passives per se in Japanese, but rather its occurrence is induced by *rare*. It follows from this that dichotomizing the *ni* agent phrase in *ni* direct and *ni* indirect passives into two different categories, adjuncts and arguments (e.g., Hoshi 1999, contra Kitagawa and Kuroda 1992), needs some revision, i.e., there needs to be a mechanism to somehow license the occurrence of the *ni* agent phrase by *rare* in both types of passives. The function of *ni* in the *ni* direct/indirect passives (marking an agent or some other semantic role), in fact, are quite distinct from other uses of *ni*, which marks a goal, location, result of change, purpose, etc. The function of *ni* in *ni* passives is similar or identical to that of the *ni* phrases controlling a PRO subject in control constructions, e.g. the causative construction, the benefactive construction with (*-te*) *moraw* ‘have (someone) do such-and-such,’ etc., and it is indeed confined to them. If the *ni* phrase in the *ni* direct passive is a freely occurring adjunct, it would remain as a mystery why a similar use of *ni* cannot be found elsewhere. Passive VN constructions, I believe, can throw a new light on a connection between *ni* and the passive morpheme *rare*.

WORKS CITED:

- Fukuda, S. (2006) Japanese passives, external arguments, and structural case. *San Diego Linguistic Papers*, Issue 2, 86 -133. University of California, San Diego.
- Hopper, P. and Thompson, S. (1980) Transitivity in grammar and discourse, *Language* 56, 251-299.
- Hoshi, H. (1999) Passives. In N. Tsujimura, ed., *The Handbook of Japanese Linguistics* (pp. 191-235). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Kageyama, T. (1993) *Bunpoo to Gokeisei* [Grammar and Word Formation]. Tokyo: Hituzi Syobo.
- Kitagawa, Y. and Kuroda, S.-Y. (1992) Passive in Japanese, V. 5.3. Ms., Indiana University and UCSD.
- Miyagawa, S. (1989) *Syntax and semantics 22: Structure and case marking in Japanese*. NY: Academic Press.
- Ono, N. (1997) Externalization and event structure. In T. Kageyama, ed., *Verb Semantics and Syntactic Structure*, pp. 149-176. Tokyo: Kurosio Publishers.
- Sato, Y. (2008) A phonologically null copula functioning as a light verb in Japanese. In M. Endo Hudson, et al., eds., *Japanese/Korean Linguistics*, Volume 13 (pp. 207-217). Stanford: CSLI.
- Shibatani, M. (2006) On the conceptual framework of voice phenomena, *Linguistics* 17 (1/2), 217-268.