

A Function of Noun-Modifying Clauses in Japanese Existential Sentences

(Category: cognitive/ functional syntax/ semantics)

Japanese existential verbs *aru/ iru* can be used to express the notion of location, existence and possession (Kinsui 1982, 2006; Nishiyama 2003). I will propose one of the usages of *aru/ iru* which expresses the notion of existence focusing on its particular usage represented in (1).

- (1) *Baker-gai-ni kaeri-tsuki, toguchi-de Holmes-ga kagi-o sagutteiru toki,*

When Holmes came back to Baker Street and searched for his key,

toorisugari-ni koe-o kake-ta mono-ga a-ru.

in passing speak-PST person-NOM exist-PRES

someone spoke to Holmes in passing.

"The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes"(Translated by Nobuhara 1953)

Underlined expression in (1) is a complex sentence with a verb *aru* which has the notion of existence. This existential sentence *X-ga aru* "X-NOM exists" takes a complement clause as a subject *X*, which is a noun-modifying clause. Noun-modifying clauses are relative clause-like structures in Japanese, and in the case of (1) the modifying clause has a syntactic gap which co-refers with the head noun *mono*. Interestingly, the underlined existential sentence is paraphrasable by (2), which is not an existential sentence.

- (2) *Aru mono-ga toorisugari-ni koe-o kake-ta.*

a person-NOM in passing speak-PST

someone spoke to Holmes in passing.

Both (1) and (2) are natural Japanese expression and are felicitous in the context. In fact, (1) is interpreted as an event that someone spoke to Holmes rather than the existence of the person. Moreover, the original English text is closer to (2) as shown in (3).

- (3) We had reached Baker Street and had stopped at the door. He was searching his pockets for the key when someone passing said: "Good-night, Mister Sherlock Holmes."

This observation suggests that the complex existential sentences as (1) are used to produce some expressive effect in Japanese. I used the literature corpus "Shincho no 100 satsu CD-ROM" to collect samples of this type and investigated the effect in terms of the function of noun-modifying clauses and existential sentences. The existential sentence in question works to highlight the person expressed by the head noun rather than his action expressed by the modifying clause. The subsequent sentences introduce the person in more details such as the name, the background information, or the relationship with other characters who have already appeared in the story and thus have known by the reader. In the case of (1), the information "a slim youth in an ulster who

had hurried by." is provided in the subsequent context.

In conclusion, the existential sentence of this type is used to introduce a new character into the story as well as to describe the action made by the person. Since it expresses both the event happening and the existence of the person who causes the event, it is not the same type as the existential sentence to introduce a main character into at the beginning of a story proposed by Kinsui (2006), such as "Mukashi aru yamaoku-no mura-ni, taro-toiu otokonoko-ga atta"(Once upon a time in a village in the mountains, there was a boy called Taro). But the common function is to introduce new character into a story , and it can be explained in terms of the function of existential sentences. It is also pointed out that the existential sentences in question are not the same type as the one represented in (5) which has been investigated in previous studies. (4) is an original English text from a newspaper article that roughly corresponds to (5). The distinctive feature to discriminate (5) against (1) is that the fact that (5) is not paraphrasable by (6).

(4) Some students never set foot in a lecture theatre.

.(Mar.10, 2011, <http://www.independent.co.uk>)

(5) *Kougishitsu-ni ippo-mo ashi-o fumi-ire-nai gakusei-mo a-ru.*

lecture theatre-GOAL a step-even foot-ACC step-in-NEG student-even exist-PRES

(6) **Nan-nin-ka no gakusei-ga kougishitsu-ni ashi-o fumi-ire-nai.*

some students-NOM lecture theatre-GOAL foot-ACC step-in-NEG

(5) can not be interpreted as an event that some students stepped into the lecture theatre, rather, it expresses the existence of the sub-category to the category of the head noun, "students". Although underlined existential sentences in (1) and (5) has the same grammatical structure, the contrast in function is evident as shown in the corresponding English texts and the paraphrasability test. The distinction can be explained in terms of the actual/ virtual contrast (Langacker 2009) of the noun-modifying clauses.

References

- Doyle, Arthur Conan. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Project Gutenberg <www.gutenberg.org/> (Nobhara, Ken (translates) Shinchou-bunko-no100-satsu CD-ROM 1995. Tokyo: Shinchosha.)
- Kinsui, Satoshi. 1982. "Hito-o Shugo-tosuru SOnzai-hyougen", *Kokugo to Kokubungaku* 59 (12), Tokyo University Kokugo Kokubun Gakkai. pp.58-73.
- Kinsui, Satoshi. 2006. *Nihon-go Sonzai-hyougen no Rekishi*, Tokyo: Hitsuji-shobo
- Langacker, Ronald W. 2009. *Investigations in Cognitive Grammar*, Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Nishiyama, Yuji. 2003. *Nihon-go Meishi-ku no Imiron to Goyouron*, Tokyo: Hitsuji-shobo.