When intransitives behave like passive: De-causativization in Japanese
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Cross-linguistically, verbs like ‘break’, ‘burn’, ‘melt’, and ‘open’ typically participate in inchoative/causative alternation, but verbs like ‘dance’ and ‘work’ do not. One salient semantic property of the former ‘inchoative/causative verb’ pairs is that an agentive meaning is not encoded in the intransitive verbs.

(1) a. John broke the vase.
b. The vase broke.

Due to the difference in the meanings of the pairs of verbs, it is often assumed that two distinct semantic representations, i.e. decomposed Logical Structures in RRG, are related to yield the transitivity alternation (see e.g. Van Valin 1993).

(2) [do' (x, φ)] CAUSE [BECOME broken' (y)] ⇐⇒ [BECOME broken' (y)]

Since the LS on the left contains two variables, which are realized as marcrorole arguments, it represents the meaning of a transitive clause like (1a). The LS on the right does not have part of LS representing an activity, so that the LS is related to an intransitive clause like (1b).

Nevertheless, it is observed (e.g. Haspelmath 1993) that in certain languages, intransitive (inchoative) verbs sometimes include an agentive meaning, while English lacks this option entirely. Japanese has such intransitive verbs, as in (3).

(3) a. Kodomo-ga nantoka (*karera-ni) tasukat-ta.
   child-TOP somehow them-by be.rescued-PST
   ‘The child was somehow rescued (by them).’
   child-TOP somehow them-by rescue-PASS-PST
   ‘The child was somehow rescued (by them).’

In Japanese, intransitive verbs are related to transitive verbs via morphological affixation of an intransitivizing or a transitivizing suffix. The intransitive tasukar-u in (3a) differs morphologically from the passive verb tasuke-rare-ru in (3b), derived by combining the transitive tasukeru with the passive rare. The described event in (3a) (in the intended sense) cannot be realized unless some agentive action is involved (and thus the meaning of the intransitive clause in (3a) can only be expressed by a passive clause in English). Despite the verb’s carrying an agentive meaning, the agent, which is implied by the meaning of the verb, can never be realized.

On the other hand, there is also a class of intransitive verbs that allow an agent to be manifested with morphologically oblique marking, as in (4a).

(4) a. Gootoo-ga (keikan-ni) tukamat-ta.
    burglar-NOM police-by be.caught-PAST
    ‘The burglar was caught (by the police).’
b. Gootoo-ga (keikan-ni) tukamae-rare-ta.
burglar-NOM police-by catch-PASS-PAST
‘The burglar was caught (by the police).’

(4a) is an intransitive clause, but has a passive-like form because the agent is obliquely marked in a way similar to the passive clause in (4b).

The facts of the intransitive verbs in (3a) and (4a) raise the theoretically interesting question of why the agent can be realized in one class of intransitive verbs but not in the other class, even though both classes of verbs carry agentive meanings. To account for the facts on the class of intransitive verbs including *tasukaru* ‘be rescued’ in (3a), Kageyama (1996) suggests that verbs like (3a) include the meaning of an agent act but its participant is not realized. While Kageyama does not fully specify how the agent is prevented from being realized, I suggest that intransitive verbs carrying agentive meanings have the LS in (5), in which a variable is replaced by a constant.

(5) \[\text{[do'} (C, \phi)] \text{CAUSE [BECOME rescued'} (y)]\]

In (5), the constant saturates the slot in the activity LS, and hence is not linked to an argument, the result of which is that the agent cannot be realized. Since (5) has only one argument to be realized as a macrorole argument, it follows that even if the agent can be identified contextually, it cannot appear as an argument in the clause.

This analysis faces a challenge in accounting for the facts of (4a), where an obliquely-marked agent is present. In regard to (4a), I propose that the agent is made available by virtue of equating the constant agent with a locative argument, as represented in (6).

(6) \[\text{[do'} (C_i, \phi)] \text{CAUSE [BECOME captured'} (y) \& be-at' (z_i, y)]\]

The line under the LS indicates an identity relation between the constant C and the variable z. When this relation is established, the agent can be linked to a variable in the LS, and hence, it can be realized in the clause. In (6), the variable y is the only macrorole argument, and hence is realized as the subject. On the other hand, the variable z is a location, and hence is realized as an oblique argument. Note that unlike the passive clause (4b), (4a) does not involve any marked macrorole assignment, i.e. the arguments are aligned in the usual linking algorithm.

The present analysis entails that the agent counts as a location in (4a), and accordingly, makes the prediction that if no semantic relation is established, a pure location surfaces as an oblique argument. The contrast in acceptability shows that the *ni*-marked argument for the intransitive *tukamaru* is not restricted to an agent.

bear-NOM trap-by/hunter-by be.caught-PST
‘The bear was caught {in the trap/by the hunter}.’

b. {Ryoosi-ga/*Wana-ga} kuma-o tukamae-ta.
hunter-NOM/trap-NOM bear-ACC catch-PST
‘{The hunter/The trap} caught the bear.’
The fact suggests that in (7a), the *ni*-marked argument should be a realization of the variable \( z \) in *be-at’* \((z, y)\), which indicates that (7a) is an intransitive clause (and not a passive), and carries the meaning of ‘the event of the bear’s getting caught takes place at some location, which could be identified as the agent.

I also present other empirical data showing that the relevant *ni*-marked argument is a location rather than a genuine agent. The core claim in this paper is that since Japanese has a semantic means of equating the location with the agent, the intransitive clause (4a), which expresses approximately the same argument realization pattern as the passive clause (4b), allows an ‘apparent’ agent to be expressed overtly.

References