

When Intransitives Behave Like Passive: De-Causativization in Japanese

Hideki Kishimoto
 Kobe University

1. Introduction

In this presentation, I will discuss some peculiar transitive-intransitive alternations in Japanese, and provide an RRG analysis.

- (1) a. Kodomo-ga tasukat-ta.
 child-NOM be.rescued-PST
 ‘The child was rescued.’ (intransitive)
- b. Kodomo-ga tsukamat-ta.
 child-NOM be.caught-PST
 ‘The child was caught.’ (intransitive)

The examples in (1), which include intransitive verbs, are intransitive counterparts of the transitive sentences in (2).

- (2) a. Ken-ga kodomo-o tasuke-ta.
 Ken-NOM child-ACC rescue-PST
 ‘Ken rescued the child.’ (transitive)
- b. Ken-ga kodomo-o tukamae-ta.
 Ken-NOM child-ACC catch-PST
 ‘Ken caught the child.’ (transitive)

The intransitive clauses in (1) can only be translated into passive clauses in English. In this presentation, I will provide an RRG analysis of the peculiar facts.

2. Transitive-Intransitive Pairs

Cross-linguistically, verbs carrying the meanings of ‘break’, ‘burn’, ‘melt’, and ‘open’ typically participate in inchoative/causative alternation, but verbs carrying the meanings of ‘dance’ and ‘work’ do not.

- (3) a. Kodomo-ga doa-o sime-ta.
 child-NOM door-ACC close-PST
 ‘The child closed the door.’ (transitive)
- b. Doa-ga simat-ta.
 door-NOM close-PST
 ‘The door closed.’ (intransitive)

This type of transitive alternation is commonly found. This alternation is often referred to as involving ‘anti-causativization’. Nevertheless, it is observed (e.g. Haspelmath 1993) that intransitive (inchoative) verbs sometimes include an agentive meaning.

- (4) a. Kodomo-ga nantoka (*karera-ni) tasukat-ta.
 child-TOP somehow them-by be.rescued-PST
 ‘The child was somehow rescued (by them).’ (intransitive)
- b. Kodomo-ga nantoka (karera-ni) tasuke-rare-ta.
 child-TOP somehow them-by rescue-PASS-PST
 ‘The child was somehow rescued (by them).’ (passive)

The described event in (4a) cannot be realized unless some agentive action is involved. This type of intransitive clause is not available in English, and the meaning of the intransitive clause in (4a) can only be expressed by a passive clause in English.

While the agent can never be realized in (4a), there is a class of intransitive inchoative verbs that allow an agent to be manifested with oblique marking, as in (5a).

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

(5a) has a passive-like form because the agent is obliquely marked in a way similar to the passive clause in (5b). We can find similar cases in other languages, as in (6).

- (6) a. Bé whet’e.
 meat be.cooked
 ‘The meat is cooked.’ (Slave)
- b. Kartoshka vyrashivaetsja (moei mamoi).
 potato grow.3 sg. my.sing.inst mum.inst
 ‘The potato is being grown (by my mum).’ (Russian)

The facts of (4a) and (5a) raise the theoretically interesting question of why the agent can be realized in one class of intransitive verbs but not in the other class.

3. Anti-Causativization

One salient semantic property of the ‘inchoative/causative verb’ pairs in (7) is that an agentive meaning is not encoded in the inchoative (or intransitive) verbs.

- (7) a. John-ga kabin-o kowasi-ta.
 John-NOM vase-ACC break-PST
 ‘John broke the vase.’

- (14) a. Kodomo-ga nantoka tasukat-ta.
 child-TOP somehow be.rescued-PST
 ‘The child was somehow rescued.’ (intransitive)
- b. Tuukoonin-ga kodomo-o nantoka tasuke-ta.
 passenger-NOM child-ACC somehow rescue-PST
 ‘The passenger somehow rescued the child.’ (transitive)

In (14a), the agent, which is implied by the meaning of the verb, can never be realized. Kageyama (1996) suggests that (14a) includes the meaning of an agentive action, but its argument is not realized (ϕ indicates that the variable is not realized in the clause).

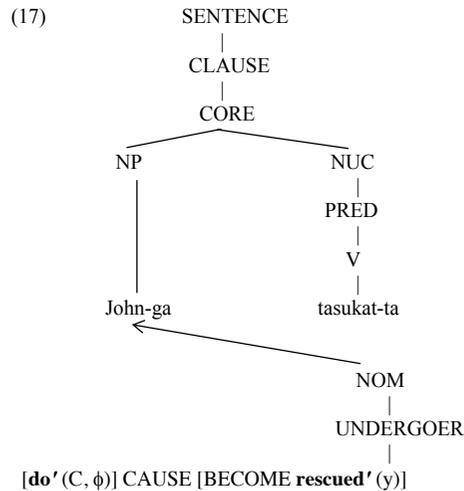
- (15) x CONTROL [y BECOME BE-AT z]
 |
 ϕ

I propose that a variable appearing in the lexical predicate representing an activity is replaced by a constant, as in (16).

- (16) [do' (C, ϕ)] CAUSE [BECOME rescued' (y)]

The intransitive clause has an Undergoer, which realized as a syntactic pivot, i.e. the subject (in Japanese).

For the nature of the macrorole, the rule in (11b) applies. I suggest that this marked choice is motivated by the fact that the activity LS is filled by a constant.



5. De-Causativization (With Agent)

The present analysis faces a challenge in accounting for the facts of (18) (=4a)), where an obliquely-marked agent is present.

- (18) a. Gootoo-ga (keikan-ni) tukamat-ta.
 burglar-NOM police-by be.caught-PST
 ‘The burglar was caught (by the police).’ (intransitive)
- b. Gootoo-ga (keikan-ni) tukame-rare-ta.
 burglar-NOM police-by catch-PASS-PST
 ‘The burglar was caught (by the police).’ (passive)

The *ni*-marked argument for the intransitive *tukamaru* is not restricted to an agent, but can be a location.

- (19) Kuma-ga {wana-ni/ryoosi-ni} tukamat-ta.
 bear-NOM trap-by/hunter-by be.caught-PST
 ‘The bear was caught {in the trap/by the hunter}.’ (intransitive)

In (19), since the *ni*-marked argument is a locative argument, it can be assumed to be a realization of the variable *x* in **be-at'** (*x*, *y*). Then I propose that the agent is made available by virtue of identifying the constant agent with a locative argument, as represented in (20).

- (20) [do' (C, ϕ)] CAUSE [BECOME caught' (y) & be-at' (x, y)]

With *tukamaru*, if the agent is not realized, the verb has the LS in (21) without a locative predicate. The LS in (21) simply specifies a catching act.

- (21) [do' (C, ϕ)] CAUSE [BECOME caught' (y)]

- (22) a. John-ga eki-de takusii-o tukamae-ta
 John-NOM station-at taxi-ACC catch-PAST
 ‘John caught a taxi. (=John took a taxi.)’ (transitive)
- b. Eki-de takusii-ga tukamat-ta.
 station-at taxi-NOM catch-PAST
 ‘The taxi is caught (=Someone took a taxi at the station.)’ (intransitive)

The transitive clause in (22a) means that John took a taxi by catching it at the station. A similar meaning is expressed in (22b). But (23), where the agent is present, carries an additional meaning.

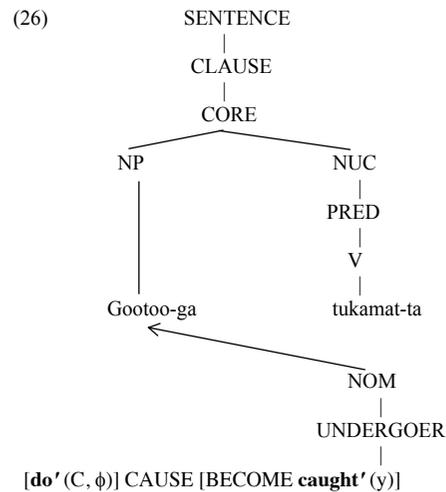
- (23) #Eki-de takusii-ga John-ni tukamat-ta.
 station-at taxi-NOM John-DAT catch-PAST
 ‘The taxi is caught by John and stuck’ (intransitive)

The sentence means that the taxi is stuck in John's place (and this is the meaning coming from **be-at'** (x, y) in (20). In (22), this meaning is not expressed, so we can assume that the default LS is the one given in (21). The addition of a locative predicate is an option allowed for the intransitive verb *tukamaru* only, as the unacceptability of (24) indicates.

- (24) *Ryoosi-ga kuma-o wana-ni tukamat-ta.
 hunter-NOM bear-ACC hunter-DAT catch-PAST
 'The hunter caught the bear in the trap. (transitive)

If an agent is not realized, as in (25), it is possible to handle the case involving the intransitive clause headed by *tukamaru* 'be caught' in the same way as the case involving *tasukaru* 'be rescued'.

- (25) Gootoo-ga tukamat-ta.
 burglar-NOM be.caught-PAST
 'The burglar was caught.'

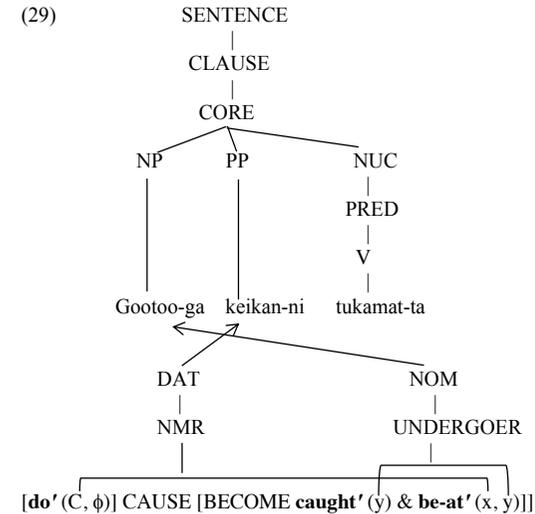


When the agent is expressed, as in (27), a different treatment is required, since the LS necessarily includes **be-at'** (y, x).

- (27) Gootoo-ga keikan-ni tukamat-ta.
 burglar-NOM police-by be.caught-PAST
 'The burglar was caught (by the police).' (intransitive)

The LS for (27) is (20). The agent is identified as a non-macrorole core argument, which is subject to the rule in (28). (Van Valin 2005: 110)

- (28) Assign dative case to non-macrorole direct core arguments (default).



6. Concluding Remarks

Intransitive verbs carrying agentive meanings have the LS expressing agentivity, where a variable is replaced by a constant. For the case where an obliquely-marked agent is present, I have proposed that the agent is made available by virtue of equating the constant agent with a locative argument.

Selected References

- Haspelmath, Martin (1993). "More on the typology of inchoative/causative verb alternations." In B. Comrie and M. Polinsky (eds.) *Causatives and Transitivity*, 87-120. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Kageyama, Taro (1996). *Doosi Imiron* [Verb Semantics]. Tokyo: Kuroshio Publishers.
- Nichols, Johana, David A. Peterson, and Jonathan Barnes (2004) Transitivity and detransitivizing languages. *Linguistic Typology* 8, 149-211.
- Van Valin, Robert D. Jr. (1993). "A synopsis of Role and Reference Grammar." In Robert D. Van Valin Jr. (ed.) *Advances in Role and Reference Grammar*, 1-165. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Van Valin, Robert D. Jr. (2005). *Exploring the Syntax and Semantics Interface*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Valin, Robert D. Jr., and Randy J. LaPolla (1997). *Syntax: Structure, Meaning and Function*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.