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The Postposing Construction in Japanese

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Japanese is said to be a verb-final language (Kuno 1978). In colloquial speech, however, elements frequently follow the main clause verbs as exemplified below in (1), with the relevant element in bold:

- (1) Kuruma-o kinou kat-ta (yo) **Taro-ga**.
car -Acc yesterday buy-Past FP **Taro-Nom**
“Taro bought a car yesterday.”

Since the sentence that contains a post-verbal element seems to involve rightward movement, it is sometimes called a postposing construction (see Shimojo (1995)); henceforth, let us call it PPC.

There are two types of possible approaches to PPC in Japanese: (i) movement analysis, which can be further subclassified into two parts: (a) rightward movement analysis (e.g. Kaiser (1999)) and (b) leftward movement analysis (Abe (2003); Tanaka (2001); Whitman (2000)), and (ii) base-generation analysis (Kuno (1978); Sells (1999)).

I adopt the X-bar schema as schematised in (2). I also propose that the “postposed” phrase is base-generated in a position adjoined to the right of CP as in (3), claiming that association rules should be formulated such that the “post-posed” element can be given a proper interpretation.

- (2) $X^j \rightarrow \dots X^i \dots$, $i \leq j \leq 2$ where X ranges over V, N, A, P, I, C

(Rochemont & Culicover (1990: 6))

- (3) [_{CP} [_{CP}] the “post-posed” phrase]

- (4) Association rules

- I. Associate an indexed phrase (NP or CP) with the argument that has the same index within the relevant clause.
- II. As for adjuncts, associate a head (e.g. N, A, V, I) with a phrase (XP) semantically compatible with it that c-commands it.

(Note: It is assumed that indices are assigned either by movement or freely (see Chomsky (1981)).)

I show that a base-generation analysis is empirically preferable to a movement analysis, based on the observation that a movement analysis is incompatible with a lot of acceptable examples that would violate constraints on movement such as the Complex NP Constraint, as shown below:

- (5) Kore wa [_{NP}[_{CP} [kinou t_i katta] kuruma] da yo **Taro-ga**
this Top yesterday buy-Past car is FP **Taro-Nom**
“This is a car which Taro bought yesterday.”

I argue that some of the syntactic properties observed in Japanese PPC follow from general assumptions about the nature of Japanese grammar. More specifically, the empirical consequences that I consider here that the base-generation analysis may have are as follows; (a) no categorical restrictions on PPC (b) absence of upward boundedness (c) freezing effects (d) multiple post-posing (e) root phenomena (f) Weak Crossover effects (g) scope ambiguity (h) the “post-posed” phrase adjoined only to CP.

The “Island” phenomena observed in PCC may be attributable to processing difficulty, which may be affected by factors such as “more intervening words”. I observe that gradient acceptability is a result of the interaction of the factors with the association rules.

Selected references

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