Japanese Passives with Verbal Nouns

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 tyyu ‘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. Keisatsu 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 tyyu 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 tyyu.

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 e-command the VN (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 VN, 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 tyyu.

(4) Seizika, ga syusaisya niyotte sono paatii ni 3-nin, ti, 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, o syusaisya, ga sono paatii ni 3-nin, ti, 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 tuuu) 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 gakutyou 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, 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 tuuu 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 kyoouyu ga keisatu niyotte/ni TAIHO sareta.

that professor Nom police by/by arrest was-done

‘That professor was arrested by the police.’

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

(11) Sono kyoouyu ga keisatu niyotte/*ni TAIHO tuuu (‘during’)

(12) Sono kyoouyu 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:


