

Fake past and a case marking constraint in Japanese potential constructions

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1. *O-ga* conversion and fake past (-*ta* of discovery)

The object DP in Japanese potential constructions (PCs) is marked either with accusative *-o* or nominative *-ga*. This case alternation is observed either in present or past PCs.

- (1) Taroo-wa (kodomo-no koro) huransugo{-*o/ -ga*} hanas-e {**ru/ ta**}.
 Taroo-Top (child-Gen time) French{-Acc/-Nom} speak-can {Pres/ Past}
 ‘Taro {can/ could} speak French (when he was a child).’

It has been known that several factors affect PCs to favor one case over the other (e.g. Kuno 1973). Here I present one factor that has gone unnoticed before:

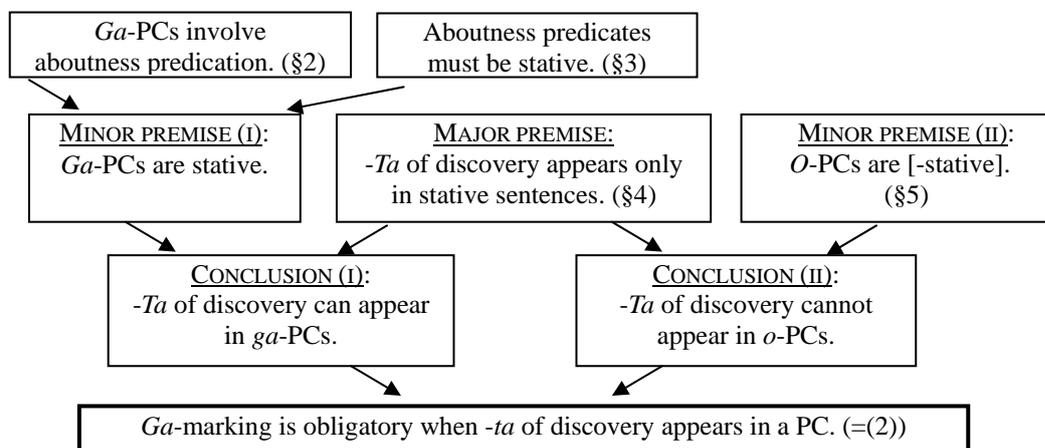
- (2) *Ga*-marking is obligatory when a modal particle known as *hakken-no -ta* ‘-*ta* of discovery’ appears in a PC.

A relevant example is given in (3).

- (3) Nanto, Taroo-wa huransugo{?**-o/ -ga*} hanas-e **ta** nda.
 wow Taro-Top French{-Acc/-Nom} speak-can *ta* Modal
 ‘Wow, (I didn’t know) Taro can speak French.’

The speaker may utter (3) when s/he sees Taro speaking French at the speech time. *-Ta* in this case obviously does not express pastness, but the sense of discovery. Notice that *o*-marking on the object is not allowed in (3).

The aim of this presentation is to account for why (2) is the case. The discussion structure of the presentation is as follows:



2. *Ga*-PCs involve aboutness predication.

Takano (2003) suggests that the *ga*-marked object in a *ga*-PC is not an argument of the stem verb but is related to the stem verb phrase by *aboutness*.

- (4) [TP [VP2 DP_i-Nom [VP2 DP_j-ga [VP1 PRO_i [VP1 pro_j V] v] can] v] T]
- aboutness

We see evidence for Takano’s analysis in the presentation.

3. Aboutness predicates must be [+stative].

According to Mihara and Hiraiwa (2006), aboutness predication is also involved in multiple

nominative constructions (MNCs) and perception verb constructions (PVCs).

- (5) a. Taroo-ga se-ga takai. [MNC]
Taro-Nom height-Nom tall
'It is Taro that is tall.'
- b. Watasi-wa Hanako-o tensai da-to omot ta. [PVC]
I-Top Hanako-Acc genius be-that think Past
'I thought that Hanako was a genius.'

Researchers on either type of constructions have suggested the following semantic constraint (e.g. Heycock and Doron 2003 for MNCs; Harada 2002 for PVCs):

- (6) Aboutness predicates must be stative.

Assuming that (6) is a general constraint, it follows that the stem verb phrase in *ga*-PCs, which is identified as an aboutness predicate in section 2, should be made stative somehow. In the presentation I also provide evidence that potential morpheme does not affect the stativity of the predicate phrase with which it associates, which, combined with (6), leads to the following conclusion:

- (7) *Ga*-PCs are stative.

4. *-Ta* of discovery appears only in [+stative] sentences.

Researchers have observed that *-ta* of discovery appears only in stative sentences (e.g. Masuoka 2000, Kudo 2001). Relevant examples are shown below:

- (8) a. A, *at ta*.
oh, be *ta* 'Oh, here it is.'
- b. (The speaker discovers it is raining at the speech time;)
Are, ame-ga hut *te i ta* noka/ * *hut ta* noka.
oh, rain-Nom fall Prg *ta* Modal/ fall *ta* Modal
'Oh, (I didn't know) it is raining.'

The conclusions we have reached in sections 2 to 4 are as follows:

- (9) a. Sections 2 and 3: *Ga*-PCs are stative.
b. Section 4: *-Ta* of discovery appears only in stative sentences.

Given (9a) and (9b), it follows that *-ta* of discovery can appear in *ga*-PCs.

5. *O*-PCs are [-stative].

Let us then consider the compatibility between *-ta* of discovery and *o*-PCs. Recall that aboutness predication is not involved in *o*-PCs and that potential morpheme does not affect stativity. The [-stative] feature of the stem verb hence percolates up and makes *o*-PCs [-stative]. Consequently, *-ta* of discovery cannot appear in *o*-PCs.

Putting them all together, the observed fact (2) follows, as demonstrated in the discussion structure in section 1.

References

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