

snippets

Issue 29

June 2015

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3.

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Ergativity of adjectives in Japanese

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doi: 10.7358/snip-2015-029-kish

Intransitive verbs are divided into ‘unergatives’, which take external arguments generated in subject position, and ‘ergatives’ (or ‘unaccusatives’), which take internal arguments appearing in object position underlyingly (Perlmutter 1978, Burzio 1982, Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995, and others). Remarkably, a similar division can be found among adjectives: Japanese has ergative adjectives, alongside unergative adjectives (see Cinque 1990 for discussion of Italian facts).

In Japanese, the existence of the ergative class of adjectives is verified by considering an unaccusative diagnostic based on the adverb *takusan* ‘many’ (Kageyama 1993, Kishimoto 2005). *Takusan* has the property that it can specify the quantity of internal arguments (even if they are not contiguous), but not external arguments. Thus, *takusan* can specify the quantity of the subject, but not the object, of a transitive verb, as in (1).

- (1) Kodomo-ga hon-o soko-de takusan yon-da.
child-NOM book-ACC there-in many read-PAST
‘Children read many books there/*Many children read books there.’
(* on the intended interpretation)

This heuristic allows us to assess the ergative split of intransitive verbs. The adverb *takusan* can quantify over the subject (internal argument) of an ergative verb, but not the subject (external argument) of an unergative verb, as indicated in (2a-b).

- (2) a. Kodomo-ga soko-de takusan koron-da.
child-NOM there-in many fall.down-PAST
‘Many children fell down there.’
b. Kodomo-ga soko-de takusan hasit-ta.
child-NOM there-in many run-PAST
‘*Many children ran there.’

(In (2b), *takusan* can still specify the amount of an action described by the unergative verb, since it can be a predicate modifier).

Interestingly, even with intransitive adjectives (which can be either adjectives with *-i* ending and adjectives with *-da* ending (=nominal adjectives)), a difference in acceptability arises with regard to *takusan*-modification.

- (3) a. Kami-ga naka-de takusan siwakytua-ni nat-ta
paper-NOM inside many rumped become-PAST
‘Many sheets of paper became rumped inside.’
b. *Kodomo-ga soko-de takusan hukigen-ni nat-ta.
child-NOM there-in many ill-tempered become-PAST
‘*Many children became ill-tempered there.’

As seen in (3), *takusan* can quantify over the subject of *siwakutyada* ‘rumpled’, but not *hukigenda* ‘ill-tempered’. (In (3), the adjectival clauses are embedded under the verb *naru* ‘become’ to provide an adjunction site for *takusan*, which is primarily used for verbal modification.)

Both adjectives in (3) take theme arguments as subjects, but there is a discernible semantic difference: *siwakutyada* ‘rumpled’ in (3a) describes an external state or an externally observable state of the subject, but *hukigenda* ‘ill-tempered’ in (3b) indicates an internal state of the subject. Adjectives patterning with *siwakutyada* include *boroboroda* ‘weary’, *makkuroda* ‘pitch-black’, *kitanai* ‘dirty’. On the other hand, adjectives patterning with *hukigenda* include *yuutuda* ‘gloomy’, *tumaranai* ‘bored’ (taking animate subjects), as well as *omosiroi* ‘interesting’ and *tanosii* ‘enjoyable’ (taking animate or inanimate subjects). It is easy to see that the two classes of adjectives share the semantic properties distinguishing between *siwakutyada* and *hukigenda*. The facts suggest then that the ergativity of intransitive adjectives, i.e. the division between unergative and ergative adjectives, is determined according to whether they describe external or internal states of the theme arguments.

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