

OBJECT TOPICALIZATION, PASSIVE, AND INFORMATION STRUCTURE IN JAPANESE

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ABSTRACT

Object topicalization shares two functional properties with the passive: foregrounding of the patient and de-topicalization of the agent. This fact makes one wonder why the former occurs far less frequently in written text. The present paper is an attempt to illuminate some properties of object topicalization not shared by the passive. It is argued that while object topicalization may de-topicalize the agent, informational focus is brought upon it. It is then proposed that the information structure imposed by object topicalization has consequences different from the passive on the continuing discourse.

1. INTRODUCTION

Functionally, the passive is generally understood to be a syntactic construction that topicalizes the patient, de-topicalizes the agent and stativizes the event (Givon [1] cited by Forrest [2, p.149]). If one takes the view that constructions can be related by a function, as Givon [3] and Shibatani [4] do, object topicalization in a topic-prominent language like Japanese should be related to the passive because it can perform the first two functions listed above. Indeed, object topicalization appears occasionally in place of a passive in English-to-Japanese translation. However, an examination of the properties of object topicalization reveals that the resemblance is only partial. This paper presents a study of object topicalization in relation to the passive in Japanese. First, I argue that object topicalization is semantically more restricted and information-structurally marked than the passive. Then, I propose that the difference in information structure presents different effects on the continuing discourse. The rest of the paper discusses the two constructions in written register only, because it is recognized (e.g. by Biber et al.[5] and Heo [6]) that generalization across registers/genres is difficult.

2. OBJECT TOPICALIZATION AND THE PASSIVE COMPARED

Compare (1a) and (1b). (TOP=Topic, NOM=Nominative, PASS=Passive, PST=Past)

- (1) a. *Tegami wa hisyo niyotte kakus-are-ta.*
letter TOP secretary by hide-PASS-PST
'The letter was hidden by the secretary.'

- (1) b. *Tegami wa hisyo ga kakusi-ta.*
 letter TOP secretary NOM hide-PST
 'The letter, the secretary hid (it).'

In both, the logical object "the letter" is topicalized, and the rest of the sentence is the rheme, or added information about the topic (Vallduvi and Vilkuna [7] among others). While object topicalization is quite marked and appears primarily in spoken register in English (Lambrecht [8]), it is not so marked in Japanese and is allowed more freely in written register. However, a small sample of *Newsweek* magazine and its published Japanese translation reveals that it is only occasionally that an English passive is translated into object topicalization. While this may be a reflection of the translator's conservatism in preserving the source text structures, it is not the case that for each "conservative" translation, object topicalization could have been possible. Yoshihara [9] observes similar uninterchangeability in monolingual newspaper texts. This suggests that the occasional appearance of object topicalization may be reflecting something systematic.

Literature on object topicalization is, somewhat surprisingly, scarce. Therefore, I start with some basic observations. First, compare in (2) the passive and object topicalization with an unexpressed agent. Like (2a), (2b) demotes the agent by not expressing it, as Yoshihara [9] rightly describes.

- (2) a. *Tegami wa kakus-are-ta.*
 letter TOP hide-PASS-PST
 'The letter was hidden.'
- b. *Tegami wa kakusi-ta.*
 letter TOP hide-PST
 'The letter, (I) hid (it).'

However, while the agent in (2a) can be anyone, the one in (2b) is limited to the writer or the protagonist in this particular context. Therefore, I claim that these two constructions have a different propositional content.

How about when the agent is expressed? Consider (1) again. Notice that the agent in object topicalization (1b) receives emphasis, yielding the reading that THE SECRETARY hid the letter, nobody else. This is observed by Teramura [10, p.241]. The passive in this regard is neutral. The focused reading can be achieved in (1a), but only with emphatic intonation on the agent phrase. (1b) requires no special intonation. This difference is significant in written register where no phonological information is available.

Object topicalization is restricted in two other ways. For one, it disallows an indefinite object from topicalizing. Compare (3a) and (3b).

- (3) a. *Ittuu-no tegami #wa/ ga hisyo niyotte kakus-are-ta.*
 one letter TOP/NOM secretary by hide-PASS-PST
 'A letter was hidden by the secretary.'

- (3) b. *Ittuu-no tegami #wa/*ga hisyo ga kakusi-ta.*
 one letter TOP/NOM secretary NOM hide-PST
 'A letter, the secretary hid (it).'

The topic position hosts given information only. The passive can accommodate an indefinite expression in the subject position marked by *ga*, but that position is taken by the agent in (3b). A new, unidentified referent in the topic position yields unacceptability. This point is also noted by Teramura [10].

The other restriction involves animacy. There are four possible combinations of animacy with the two event participants: (a) animate patient + animate agent, (b) animate patient + inanimate agent, (c) inanimate patient + animate agent, and (d) inanimate patient + inanimate agent. As (4) shows, the passive accommodates all the combinations.

- (4) a. *Taroo wa Hanako ni uragir-are-ta.*
 Taro TOP Hanako by betray-PASS-PST
 'Taro was betrayed by Hanako.'
- b. *Taroo wa huminsyoo ni nayamas-are-ta.*
 Taro TOP insomnia by trouble-PASS-PST
 'Taro was troubled by insomnia.'
- c. *Sono ginkoo wa munoona-keieisya niyotte hatan ni oikom-are-ta.*
 that bank TOP incompetent president by bankruptcy to force-PASS-PST
 'The bank was led to bankruptcy by its incompetent president.'
- d. *Sono ginkoo wa toosi-no-sippai niyotte hatan ni oikom-are-ta.*
 that bank TOP investment failure by bankruptcy to force-PASS-PST
 'The bank was led to bankruptcy by investment failure.'

However, object topicalization seems to dislike inanimate agents, as (5) shows.

- (5) a. *Taroo wa Hanako ga uragit-ta.*
 Taro TOP Hanako NOM betray-PST
 'Taro, HANAKO betrayed (him).'
- b. ??*Taroo wa huminsyoo ga nayamase-ta.*
 Taro TOP insomnia NOM trouble-PST
 'Taro, INSOMNIA troubled (him).'
- c. *Sono ginkoo wa munoona keieisya ga hatan ni oikon-da.*
 that bank TOP incompetant president NOM bankruptcy to force-PST
 'The bank, ITS INCOMPETENT PRESIDENT caused (it) to bankrupt.'
- d. ??*Sono ginkoo wa toosi-no-sippai ga hatan ni oikon-da.*
 that bank TOP investment failure NOM bankruptcy to force-PST
 'The bank, INVESTMENT FAILURE caused (it) to bankrupt.'

This can be understood in terms of the proto-typical transitivity observed in Japanese, which favors an animate agent (Jacobsen [11], Hopper and Thompson [12]). Inanimate agents are tolerated in the passive because they are in a non-prominent oblique case (i.e. in the *by*-phrase), but they are rejected in object topicalization which keeps them in the subject position and focused.

In summary, object topicalization is more restricted than the passive in terms of semantico-pragmatic argument selection: it requires a definite object and an animate agent. In addition, it places focus on the agent.

3. OBJECT TOPICALIZATION AND INFORMATION STRUCTURE

The next question is how the focus difference between the two constructions is reflected in discourse. Specifically, under what sort of condition is object topicalization used in place of the passive? Literature on focus (most recently, Lambrecht [8], Rochemont [13], Roberts [14]) generally draws observations from spoken register, so I work out a hypothesis myself.

Consider the contrast in (1) once more.

- (1) a. *Tegami wa hisyo niyotte kakus-are-ta.*
 letter TOP secretary by hide-PASS-PST
 'The letter was hidden by the secretary.'
- b. *Tegami wa hisyo ga kakusi-ta.*
 letter TOP secretary NOM hide-PST
 'The letter, THE SECRETARY hid (it).'

(1a) and (1b) both identify "the letter" as the topic, and treat the rest as the rheme. The difference is that (1b) emphasizes the agent. When do we want to place focus on the agent? I hypothesized the following as a first approximation: if (1b) is used, anaphoric reference to the agent will be observed in the sentences that follow; if (1a) is used, no mention will be made thereafter. Insignificance of the agent in the following text would justify demoting it to the oblique using the passive. But in a pilot study which tested this hypothesis, the results were not clear-cut.

A deficiency of the pilot study was that it failed to consider cleft sentence with regard to agent focusing. Cleft structure, as in (6), also places focus on the agent in question.

- (6) *Tegami o kakusi-ta no wa hisyo da.*
 letter ACC hide-PST one TOP secretary COP (ACC=Accusative, COP=Copula)
 'The person who hid the letter is the secretary.'

Indeed, Lambrecht [8, p.123] takes this structure to be synonymous with the "subject-accented" sentence (of which object topicalization is an example). However, (6) and (1b) differ with regard to the information status of the logical object. "The letter" remains to be the topic in object topicalization (1b), but it is completely backgrounded in cleft (6).

Given this, I propose a revised hypothesis. The three constructions, the passive, object topicalization and subject cleft, have the following division of labor regarding topic shift. If

the topic remains the same in the next sentence, the passive will appear, demoting the agent. If the topic shifts to the agent completely in the next sentence, the subject cleft will appear, backgrounding the rest of the event. Object topicalization will show when the topic shift is not as "rough" as in the second case.

(7)-(9) exemplify the three-way distinction. The passive, object topicalization, and subject cleft are presented in (7a), (8a) and (9a) respectively, followed by another sentence (7b), (8b) and (9b). (a) and (b) constitute a continuous discourse and they are translated together at the end of each example.

- (7) a. *Sono ginkoo wa munoona keikeisya niyotte hatan ni oikom-are-ta.*
 that bank TOP incompetent president by bankruptcy to force-PASS-PST
 b. *Genzai sisan-no-syori ga okonaw-are-teiru.*
 now asset settlement NOM conduct-PST-STAT (STAT=Stative)

'The bank was forced to bankrupt by its incompetent president. Bankruptcy procedures are being taken at the moment.'

- (8) a. *Sono ginkoo o hatan ni oikon-da no wa munoona-keieisya dearu.*
 that bank ACC bankruptcy to force-PST one TOP incompetent president COP
 b. *Kono keieisya wa hito-no iken o kikanakat -ta.*
 this president TOP others' opinion ACC not-listen-PST

'The person who caused the bank to bankrupt is its incompetent president. He didn't listen to other people's opinions.'

- (9) a. *Sono ginkoo wa munoo-na keieisya ga hatan ni oikon-da.*
 that bank TOP incompetent president NOM bankruptcy to force-PST
 b. *Baburu-no-sei dake dewa-nai.*
 due-to-bubble only COP-not

'The bank, its incompetent president caused (it) to bankrupt. It's not only because of the bursting of the bubble economy.'

Look at (b) in each example above. In (7b), the topic remains "the bank" (although not explicitly), and no mention is made of the agent of the previous event. In (8b), the topic shifts from the bank to the president. In (9b), the topic is still the bank but the focus shifts to the cause of bankruptcy. I propose that in these conditions the passive, subject cleft, and object topicalization are likely to occur respectively. Similar ideas are found in "Centering Theory" research discussed in Walker et al. eds. [15].

The proposed three-way distinction in focus on the agent is rather subtle, and I do not suggest under any of the conditions that no other structure would appear. But if the distinction exists, I expect to see statistically significant differences in the choice of the structures between these conditions proposed above. Data are being collected as I write this paper, and I hope to be able to report the results at the conference.

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