

University of Sydney
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Thesis

Being Affected:
The meanings and functions of Japanese passive constructions

Submitted by

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In fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

March 2004

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ABSTRACT

Amongst the multiple and diverse meanings and functions passive constructions hold, this study considers that the primary function of passives in Japanese is to portray an event from the point of view of an affected entity. The thesis identifies three types of affectedness in Japanese passive constructions: emotive affectedness, direct / physical affectedness, and objective affectedness. Emotive affectedness, often referred to as ‘adversative’ meaning, has drawn attention from many researchers. It has been strongly associated in the past with the syntactic category called the ‘indirect passive’, but is actually also observed in many instances of the ‘direct passive’. Direct / physical affectedness is detected mainly in the construction here referred to as the ‘direct sentient passive’. This meaning is common in passives in many other languages, including English. The last type – objective affectedness – is primarily associated with ‘non-sentient passives’, more specifically with what is here called the ‘plain passive’.

Many previous researchers have claimed a complete and apparently transparent correlation between syntactic and semantic distinctions of the Japanese passive. The present study rejects these direct correlations. In analysing authentic data, it becomes evident that the correlation is much more subtle than has generally been recognised, and that is a matter of degree or continuum, rather than a discrete, black and white issue. To reflect this view, this study proposes separate sets of categories for syntactic and semantic distinctions.

The ultimate aim of this study is to reveal how Japanese passives are actually used in real contexts. In order to achieve this aim, detailed examination of authentic written and spoken data is conducted. Some findings of the data analysis in the present study contradict previous claims, such as the finding of a large proportion of passives with a non-sentient subject and very low frequency of occurrence of indirect passives.

This research also finds that, although more than half of the propositional meanings in the passive data examined are ‘negative’, a considerable number of passives still appear in a proposition with a neutral or positive meaning. Another prominent finding regarding propositional meaning is that it seems to be related to the degree of centrality of the passive subject to the event. With regard to the syntactic classification of passive, in particular, it is observed that the lower the degree of the centrality of the subject of the passive to the event, the greater the likelihood that the passive clause involves a negative proposition.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the guidance and support of numerous people, this thesis could not have been completed. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all these people.

Firstly, I would like to thank my principal supervisor, Professor Hugh Clarke for his wise guidance and support throughout the time of my candidature. I greatly appreciate his broad and scholarly input to my work, and value highly his comments and contributions, stemming from his vast knowledge in various fields.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to Dr Nerida Jarkey, my associate supervisor, who has also been my acting principal supervisor for six months in 2002 and for the last three months of my candidature. I could not have come this far without her unfailing support, constant warm encouragement, and friendship. I am deeply indebted to Nerida for the great deal of time and effort she has generously put into our frequent and stimulating discussions, and for her detailed and abundant comments on every aspect of my thesis.

I am also most grateful to Ms Kazumi Ishii, my mentor and friend, for her consistent support, invaluable advice and warm, hearty encouragement. Sincere thanks also to Ms XiangDong Liu, my best friend and comrade, for her kind caring and sharing the hardships and joys, and Ms Yukako Kamashita for her unwavering friendship and encouragement.

I was supported throughout my candidature by my colleagues at the University of Sydney: Professor Tony Stephens, Head of the School of Languages and Cultures, Associate Professor Elise Tipton, Chair of the Department of Japanese and Korean Studies, Dr Yasuko Claremont, Dr Hiroko Kobayashi, Associate Professor Sakuko Matsui, Dr Keizo Nanri, Mr Colin Noble, Dr Chun Fen Shao and Ms Seiko Yasumoto.

My deep gratitude also extends to my former colleagues at the University of Tasmania: Dr Maria Flutsch, Mrs Takame Ueki-Sabine and Ms Hisako Umeoka for their warm support and encouragement. Also to my former teachers at University of Tsukuba – Associate Professor Sumiko Horiguchi, Professor Toshiko Ishida, Professor Yutaka Kusanagi, Associate Professor Yuriko Sunakawa, Professor Makoto Takada, Professor Tadayuki Yuzawa, and the late Professor Hideo Teramura – I would like to convey my sincere thanks. I have also greatly appreciated valuable comments and advice from Professor Takashi Masuoka, Professor Hisashi Noda, and Professor Masayoshi Shibatani.

To all my friends I cannot begin to express my gratitude: Hiromi Ayano, Chikako Shigemori-Bucar, Mary Cerny, Rachel Clarke, Liz Cruse, Mike Dowman, Ralph Forehead, Anki Gustaffson, Hitomi Hatano, Shinji Ido, Kyoko Kanda, Yuko Katabami, Hyunhee Kim, Noriko Kitamura, Ayumi Miyamoto, Shoko Ono, Kimie Takahashi, Yuri Takahashi, Yoshiko Wada and June Williams!

Immeasurable thanks are also due to Michael Kirk for his caring and support, especially over the last six months of my candidature; he helped me get through the difficult times, and gave timely help in proof reading the final draft.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my parents, Toshio and Michiko Iwashita for their everlasting, generous support, warm-hearted encouragement and patient understanding. I cannot even begin to list the numerous ways in which they have helped me.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABL	ablative	NEG	negative
ACC	accusative	NML	nominalizer
AGT	agent	NOM	nominative
CAUS	causative	NONPAST	non-past
CLF	classifier	OBL	oblique
CLTZ	collectivizer	OCOMP	object of comparison
CMPL	complementizer	PART	particle
COMP	comparative	PASS	passive
CONJ	conjunctive	PAST	past
COP	copula	PERF	perfective
DAT	dative	PLR	plural
DESID	desiderative	POL	polite
DO	direct object	POTEN	potential
EMPH	emphatic	PRES	present
EXHT	exhortative	Q	question
GEN	genitive	QUOT	quotative
HON	honorific	RPTV	repetitive
IMP	imperative	SPON	spontaneous
INSTR	instrumental	SFP	sentence final particle
LOC	locative	TOP	topic

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