

Anticausatives Taking an Accusative Object in Japanese

Masaki Yasuhara (Ibaraki University)

Lexically related transitive and anticausative verbs in Japanese generally exhibit distinct morphological forms (e.g., *waru* ‘break (transitive)’ and *wareru* ‘break (anticausative)’), but there are a small number of intransitive verbs that can be used transitively without changing the form. This is illustrated in (1).

- (1)a. Taroo-no kuchi-ga ai-tei-ru. (intransitive sentence)
 Taro-GEN mouth-NOM open.intr-ASP-PRES
- b. Taroo-ga kuchi-o ai-tei-ru. (transitive sentence)
 Taro-NOM mouth-ACC open.intr-ASP-PRES
 ‘Taro’s mouth is open.’
- cf. Taroo-ga kuchi-o ake-tei-ru. (transitive sentence)
 Taro-NOM mouth-ACC open.tr-ASP-PRES
 ‘Taro’s mouth is open.’

The same verb form *aku* ‘open.intr’ is used in intransitive sentence (1a) and in transitive sentence (1b). Although the verb takes an accusative object, the subject *Taroo* in (1b) is not construed as an agent. The meaning of transitive sentence (1b) is almost the same with intransitive sentence (1a). Thus, the verb *aku* in (1b) is syntactically transitive but semantically and morphologically anticausative. Similar examples are shown in (2).

- (2)a. Inaho-ga koobe-o tare-ta.
 ear of rice-NOM head-ACC hang.intr-PAST
 ‘An ear of rice hung.’
- b. Taroo-ga ryoohiza-o tsui-ta
 Taro-NOM both knees-ACC touch.intr-PAST
 ‘Both Taro’s knees touched the ground.’

We will call this type of verbs “anticausatives taking an accusative object,” hereafter.

At first glance, examples such as (1b) and (2) appear to be idiosyncratic to Japanese. In this study, however, I aim to show that they can be explained by positing that they involve non-thematic Voice (Alexiadou et al. (2015)). I argue that the non-thematic Voice analysis can be applied to Japanese anticausative phenomena.

Alexiadou et al. (2015) argue that there are two types of anticausatives, marked and unmarked anticausatives, cross-linguistically. In German, this distinction is represented by the presence or absence of a reflexive pronoun, as shown in (3).

- (3)a. Das Wasser kühlt ab. (unmarked anticausative)
 b. Das Wasser kühlt sich ab. (marked anticausative)
 the water cools REFL down
 ‘The water cools down.’ (Schäfer (2008:37))

The structures of the unmarked and marked anticausatives are shown in (4).

- (4)a. [_{VP} v DP] (e.g. (3a))
 b. [_{non-thematic-VoiceP} REFL non-thematic-Voice [_{VP} v DP]] (e.g. (3b))

The marked anti-causative in (3b) is syntactically transitive but semantically anticausative. This mismatch is explained by positing non-thematic-Voice. Non-thematic-Voice introduces an external argument but it is thematically inert, so only the referent of the theme DP is involved in the event of the verb.

I propose that the anticausative and the transitive *aku* in (1a) and (1b) correspond to the unmarked and the marked anticausative, respectively, and they occur in the following syntactic structures.

- (5)a. [vP v *kuchi* 'mouth'] (e.g. (1a))
 b. [non-thematic-VoiceP *Taroo* non-thematic-Voice [vP v *kuchi* 'mouth']] (e.g. (1b))

The subject in (1b) is non-thematic, so it is not thematically involved in the event of the verb. As a result, (1b) exhibits an anticausative interpretation while retaining transitive syntax.

Our non-thematic-Voice analysis is empirically supported by the following three pieces of evidence. The first piece of evidence is concerned with the absence of agentivity. Since the external argument of non-thematic-Voice is thematically inert, it does not permit intentionality adverbs and instrumental phrases, both of which require Agents.

- (6)* *Taroo-wa* {*wazato/ryootede*} *kuchi-o* *ai-tei-ru*.
 Taro-TOP {deliberately/with both hands} mouth-ACC open.intr-ASP-PRES

Secondly, passivization cannot be applied to anticausatives taking an accusative object.

- (7)* *Kuchi-ga* *Taroo-ni* *ak-are-ta*.
 mouth-ACC Taro-DAT open-PASS-PAST

Since the external argument has no thematic-role, it cannot be absorbed by the passive morphology, and hence the unacceptability of sentence (7). Thirdly, anticausatives taking an accusative object are compatible with adverbial phrases that indicate that the event happened spontaneously such as *hitorideni* 'by itself' and causer phrases that suggest that the event was brought about by an external cause such as *odorokide* 'due to a surprise.'

- (8) *Inaho-ga* {*hirorideni/kazede*} *koobe-o* *tare-ta*.
 ear of rice-NOM {by itself/from wind} head-ACC hang.intr-PAST
 'An ear of rice hung {by itself/from wind}.'

These phrases are generally compatible with anticausatives (cf. Schäfer (2008))

In most cases, Japanese marks lexically related transitive and anticausative verbs with morphologically different suffixes. Anticausatives taking an accusative object, however, have the same morphological form with those taking no accusative object, as shown in (1). This fact suggests that morphological markings on Japanese anticausatives may be (at least in some cases) sensitive to the semantic properties of Voice.

References

- Alexiadou, A. E. Anagnostopoulou and F. Schäfer (2015) *External arguments in transitivity alternations: a layering approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. / Schäfer, F. (2008) *The syntax of (anti-)causatives: external arguments in change-of-state contexts*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.