Three Types of Ditransitive Verbs in Japanese

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1. Introduction
In this paper, I report that ditransitive verbs in Japanese are divided into three classes on the basis of their behavioral and coding properties. I show that ditransitive verbs have two major classes, which I refer to as ‘change-of-location’ and ‘change-of-possession’ verbs, and that there is one more class which shows mixed behavior.

2. Class Membership
In Japanese ditransitive verbs, arguments are marked with ‘nominative ga, dative ni, accusative o’, as illustrated in (1).

(1) a. John-ga Mary-ni hon-o age-ta.
   John-NOM Mary-DAT book-ACC give-PAST
   ‘John gave Mary a book.’
   John-NOM Mary-DAT letter-ACC send-PAST
   ‘John sent a letter to Mary.’

Ditransitive verbs take three arguments, but there is no cross-referencing system such as agreement. Some examples of change-of-possession verbs (‘give’ type verbs) are given in (2) and change-of-location verbs (‘send’ type verbs) are given in (3):

   yzuru ‘offer’, kuwaeru ‘join’, watasu ‘hand’
   b. verbs of future giving: motomeru ‘ask’, yoosei-suru ‘request’
   yurusu ‘allow’, hosyoo-suru ‘guarantee’, tanomu ‘ask’
   c. verbs of communication: yuu ‘tell’, syookai-suru ‘introduce’,
   siteki-suru ‘point out’, miseru ‘show’, simesu ‘show’

(3) a. verbs of communication: hookoku-suru ‘report’, renraku-suru ‘contact’,
   siraseru ‘notify’, meeru-suru ‘email’, tutaeru ‘convey’,
   b. verbs of sending: okuru ‘send’ yuusoo-suru ‘mail’, yusoo-suru ‘transport’,
   nageru ‘throw’, dasu ‘let out’, ireru ‘let in’
   c. verbs of carrying: motte-yuk/wotte-kuru ‘take/bring’
The *ni*-marked phrase *Mary-ni* (**Mary-DAT**) of the ‘give’ verb in (1a) behaves like a true NP, which is akin to the indirect object in (4a). On the other hand, the *ni*-marked phrase *Mary-ni* of ‘send’ verb in (1b) behaves like a PP, which is comparable to the *to*-dative in (4b).

(4) a. John gave **Mary** a book.
   b. John sent a letter to **Mary**.

Japanese differs from English, in that verbs that appear in double object constructions are confined to change-of-possession verbs, and the other ditransitive verbs appear in the postpositional object construction. This is illustrated in (5).

(5) a. **English**
   
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   b. **Japanese**
   
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3. Coding Properties

3.1. Basic Order

The arguments of ditransitive verbs may be placed in various positions as long as they are placed to the left of the verb.

(6) a. John-*ga* hon-*o* Mary-*ni* age-*ta*.
   John-*NOM* book-*ACC* Mary-*DAT* give-*PAST*

b. Mary-*ni* hon-*o* John-*ga* age-*ta*.
   Mary-*DAT* book-*ACC* John-*NOM* give-*PAST*

c. hon-*o* Mary-*ni* John-*ga* age-*ta*.
   book-*ACC* Mary-*DAT* John-*NOM* give-*PAST*

We can assume that the basic word order is nominative-dative-accusative, and the base order of dative-accusative sequence can be checked by way of fixed idioms.

(7) a. teki-*ni* senaka-*o* mise-*ru*
   enemy-*DAT* back-*ACC* show-*PRES*
   ‘show one’s back to the enemy (=retreat)’

b. *senaka-*o* teki-*ni* miseru-*ru*
   back-*ACC* enemy-*DAT* show-*PRES*

(8) a. usiro-*ni* te-*o* mawas-*u*
   back-*DAT* hand-*ACC* turn-*PRES*
   ‘turn hands to the back (=make a secret arrangement)’
b. *te-o usiro-ni mawas-u  
   hand-ACC back-DAT turn-PRES

Since idiomatic meanings are obtained when we have dative-accusative order, this order must be the basic. Nominalization lends further support to this claim.

(9) a. John-ga himawari-ni mizu-o yar-u  
   John-NOM sunflower-DAT water-ACC give-PRES  
   ‘give water to sunflowers’

b. (John-no) himawari-no mizu-no yari-kata  
   John-GEN sunflower-GEN water-GEN give-way  
   the way of giving water to sunflowers

c. *mizu-no himawari-no yari-kata  
   water-GEN sunflower-GEN give-way

When all the arguments are genitively marked, scrambling becomes unavailable. Since the agent-recipient-theme is the only available order in the nominal, the basic case marking pattern of Japanese ditransitive verbs should be ‘nominative-dative-accusative’. (see Kishimoto 2006).

3.2. Potential Forms

In Japanese, potential forms can be fairly productively formed with the addition of the potential morphemes (r)e, (r)are.

   John-DAT child-DAT toy-NOM give-can-PRES  
   ‘John can give his child a toy.’

   John-DAT student-DAT letter-NOM send-can-PRES  
   ‘John can send a letter to his students.’

The status of the two dative markings differs.

(11) a. John-ga kodomo-ni omotya-ga age-rare-ru  
   John-NOM child-DAT toy-NOM give-can-PRES  
   ‘John can give his child a toy.’

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1 Japanese has a number of idioms that look like taking an apparent accusative-dative order, as in (i).

(i) asi-o boo-ni suru  
   leg-ACC bar-COP make  
   ‘dead of feet’

Ni-marking on the noun boo is not a dative case marker, however. Rather, it should count as an adverbal form of a copula da. To my knowledge, all the idioms in this form occur with the causative suru ‘make’, which takes a small clause complement, rather than ditransitive predicates. Moreover, Miyagawa and Tsujioka (2004) discuss the existence of some idioms taking accusative-dative order, but in Kishimoto (2007b), I have argued that this does not reflect the base word order of the arguments of ordinary ditransitive predicates in Japanese.
b. *John-ni kodomo-ga omotya-ga age-rare-ru
   John-DAT child-NOM toy-NOM give-can-PRES  
   ‘John can give his child a toy.’

3.3. Alternative marking
In some cases, ni-marking can be replaced with genuine postpositions. We observe a difference between change-of-possession and change-of-location verbs.

   John-NOM child-DAT/-to/-up.to book-ACC give-PAST
   ‘John gave a book (up) to John.’

   b. John-ga gakkoo-ni/-e/-made nimotu-o okut-ta.
   John-NOM school-DAT/-to/-up.to luggage-ACC send-PAST
   ‘John sent his luggage (up) to his school.’

The postposition e carries the meaning of ‘to, toward’ (a destination) and made ‘up to’ (a limit of motion). They are compatible with change-of-location verbs, but not with change-of-possession verbs.

3.4. Recipient/Goal-subject variants
A large number of ditransitive verbs take source subjects, but some have recipient/goal-subject counterparts.

(13) a. ageru ‘give’ \(\leftrightarrow\) morau ‘get’

   b. todokeru ‘deliver’ \(\leftrightarrow\) uketoru ‘receive’

For the recipient/goal-subject variants of change-of-possession verbs, the source arguments may be marked with either kara ‘from’ or dative case. The source-subject variants of change-of-location verbs can only be marked with kara.

   ‘John got the book from the teacher.’

   John-NOM teacher-from/teacher-DAT letter-ACC receive-PAST
   ‘John received the book from the teacher.’

3.5. Compound nominal describing reciprocal action
With some ditransitive verbs, a compound nominal can be formed by combining recipient/goal-subject and source-subject verbs. Their marking patterns are different.

(15) tomodati-to-no/*-e/no/*-kara-no (omotya-no) yari-tori/yari-morai
    friend-with-GEN/-to-GEN/-from-GEN toy-GEN giving-taking/giving-getting
    ‘giving and taking (of toys) with/to/from friends’

(16) a. gakkoo-e-no/-kara-no/*-to-no (kodomo-no) okuri-mukae
    school-to-GEN/from-GEN/with-GEN child-GEN sending-returning
‘sending and returning the child to/from/with the school’
b.  tomodati-kara-no/e-no/*-to-no  tuitae-giki
friend-from-GEN/to-GEN/-with-GEN  telling-hearing
‘telling and hearing from/to/with a friend.’

4. Behavioral Properties
4.1 Relativization and Wh-question
Both dative and accusative arguments are accessible to relativization, and there is no
difference between the two classes of verbs. The same holds for wh-formation,
because recipient and theme behave in the same way.

(17) a.  [John-ga  Mary-ni  age-ta/okut-ta]  syorui
John-NOM  Mary-DAT  give-PAST/send-PAST  document
‘the documents which John gave/sent to Mary’
b.  [John-ga  syorui-o  age-ta/okut-ta]  Mary
John-NOM  document-ACC  give-PAST/send-PAST  Mary
‘Mary, to whom John gave/sent the documents.’

(18) a.  John-wa  dare-ni  syorui-o  age-ta/okut-ta  no?
John-TOP  who-DAT  document-ACC  give-PAST/send-PAST  Q
‘Who did John give/send the documents to?’
b.  John-wa  Mary-ni  nani-o  age-ta/okut-ta  no?
John-TOP  Mary-DAT  what-ACC  give-PAST/send-PAST  Q
‘What did John give/send to Mary?’

4.2. Nominalization
In nominalization, nominative and accusative arguments are changed to genitive
arguments marked with no. But dative case marking is changed to e-no ‘to-GEN’.

(19) a.  John-no  Mary-e-no  hon-no  atae-kata
John-GEN  Mary-to-GEN  book-ACC  give-way
‘the way of John’s giving Mary a book’
b.  John-no  Mary-e-no  tegemi-no  okuri-kata
John-GEN  Mary-to-GEN  letter-ACC  send-way
‘the way of John’s giving Mary a book’

4.3. Direct Passivization
Change-of-possession verbs allow both dative and accusative arguments to be
promoted to passive subjects under direct passivization.

(20) a.  Kodomo-ga  (okaasan-niyotte)  hon-o  atae-rare-ta.
child-NOM  mother-by  book-ACC  give-PASS-PAST
‘The child was given a book.’
b.  Hon-ga  (okaasan-niyotte)  kodomo-ni  atae-rare-ta.
book-NOM  mother-by  child-DAT  give-PASS-PAST
‘The book was given to the child.’
(21) a. Mary-ga nnuusitu-o yurus-are-ta.
   ‘Mary was allowed to enter the room.’

b. Nnuusitu-ga Mary-ni yurus-are-ta.
   ‘Room entering was allowed for Mary.’

On the other hand, change-of-location verbs allow only accusative arguments to be promoted to passive subjects.

(22) a. #Kodomo-ga (okaasan-niyotte) tegami-o okur-are-ta.
   ‘The child was sent a letter.’

b. Hon-ga (okaasan-niyotte) kodomo-ni okur-are-ta.
   ‘The letter was sent to the child.’

(22a) is legitimate if interpreted as an ‘adversity’ or ‘indirect’ passive, rather than a ‘direct passive’, where the nominative subject is understood to be an affectee argument. The “affectee” subject is added by base-generation.

(23) a. #John-ga kodomo-ni nak-are-ta.
   ‘John was affected by the children’s crying.’

   ‘The child was adversely affected by sending a letter to his sister.’

No direct passivization can be formed with a postpositional phrase.

   ‘John withdraw money from this bank.’

b. #Kono-ginkoo-ga John-niyotte okane-o hikidas-are-ta.
   ‘This bank was adversely affected by John’s withdrawing money.’

   ‘Money was withdrawn from this bank.’

In (22a), since the affectee is added without promotion, it is easy to add a real dative argument.

(25) #Kodomo-ga imooto-ni tegami-o okur-are-ta.
   ‘The child was adversely affected by sending a letter to his sister.’
It is possible to a dative argument to the direct passive clause in (20a), which involves a change-of-possession verb as well, but this addition radically changes the interpretation.

(26) #Kodomo-ga imooto ni hon-o atae-rare-ta.  
     child-NOM sister-DAT book-ACC give-PASS-PAST  
     ‘The child was given a book.’

4.4. Animacy constraint

The dative argument of a change-of-possession verb is confined to an animate entity. No such animacy constraint obtains with regard to a change-of-location verb.

(27) John-ga {Mary-ni/*uti-ni} hon-o atae-ta.  
     ‘John gave {Mary/his home} a book.’
(28) John-ga {Mary-ni/uti-ni} tegami-o okut-ta.  
     John-NOM Mary-to/home-to letter-ACC send-PAST  
     ‘John sent a letter to {Mary/his home}.’

In English, the animacy constraint is often dependent on the syntactic frame of the construction, rather than verb class.

(29) a. John sent {Mary/*Mary’s home} a letter.
    b. John sent a letter to {Mary/Mary’s home}.

In Japanese, the animacy constraint is determined solely based on the semantics of ditransitive verbs.

4.5. Complex Verb Formation

Compound verb formation is quite productive, and sometimes fairly regular for change-of-location verbs, so we can find a large number of (lexical) compound verbs. (Their basic meanings are more or less the same as that of the base verbs, but they differ in spatial orientation.)

(30) a. okuri-dasu (send-let.out), okuri-komu (send-let.in), okuri-tukeru (send-attach),  
     *okuri-ireru (send-let.into) …
    b. nage-dasu (throw-let.out) nage-komu (throw-let.in), nage-tukeru  
     (throw-attach), nage-ireru (throw-let.into) …
    c. hakobi-dasu (carry-out), hakobi-komu (carr-in), *hakobi-tukeru (carry-attach),  
     hakobi-ireru (carry-let.into)…

We can sometimes find (lexical) gaps, but still, (30) shows a high productivity for change-of-location verbs. By contrast, change-of-possession verbs do not readily allow for compound verb formation.

(31) a. *atae-dasu (give-let.out), *atae-komu (give-let.in), *atae-tukeru (give-attach),  
     *atae-ireru (send-let.into) …
    b. *mise-dasu (show-let.out) *mise-komu (show-let.in), mise-tukeru
Sporadically, we find compound verbs based on change-of-possession verbs describing transfer of knowledge, such as *mise-tukeru* in (31b), but this is far from regular.

4.6. Summary
Change-of-possession and change-of-location verbs pattern together in a number of linguistic phenomena, but their dative phrases behave differently in certain contexts.

5. Mixed Behavior Verbs: Verbs of Commercial Transaction
Verbs of commercial transaction like *uru* ‘sell’, *harau* ‘pay’, etc. This class of verbs shows a somewhat complex (mixed) behavior.

(32)  *uru* ‘sell’, *siharau* ‘pay’, *harau* ‘pay’, *kasu* ‘lend’, *tyuumon-sur* ‘order’, etc.

Verbs of commercial transaction fall into the class of change-of-location verbs, since they can sometimes be replaced with simple motion verbs. In (33), *deru* ‘go out’ is used synonymously with *ureru* ‘be sold’.

(33)  Kono-hon-wa moo ure-te/de-te simat-ta.
      this-book-TOP already sell-TE/go.out-TE finish-PAST
      ‘this book was already sold out.’

The recipient arguments of verbs of commercial transaction cannot be promoted to passive subjects under direct passivization, but accusative objects can.

      John-NOM used.book.store-to book-ACC sell-PAST
      ‘John sold the books to the used book store.’

      b.  #Huruhonya-ga hon-o ur-are-ta.
          used.bookstore-NOM book-ACC sell-PASS-PAST
          ‘The used book store was sold the books.’

      John-NOM Mary-DAT money-ACC pay-PAST
      ‘John paid money to Mary.’

      b.  #Mary-ga okane-o haraw-are-ta.
          Mary-NOM money-ACC pay-PASS-PAST
          ‘Mary was paid money.’

(36)  a.  Hon-ga huruhonya-ni ur-are-ta.
      book-NOM used.book.store-to sell-PASS-PAST
      ‘The books were sold to the used book store.’

      b.  Okane-ga Mary-ni haraw-are-ta.
          money-NOM Mary-to pay-PASS-PAST
‘Money was paid to Mary.’

Next, recipient/goal-subject counterparts of verbs of commercial transaction can mark their source with *kara* ‘from’ only.

(37) John-wa Mary-kara/*-ni hon-o kat-ta.
    John-TOP Mary-from/-DAT book-ACC buy-PAST
    ‘John bought a book from Mary.’

Compound verb formation is quite productive.

(38) a.  uri-dasu (sell-let.out), uri-komu (sell-let.in), uri-tukeru (sell-attach),
        *uri-ireru (sell-let.into) …
    b.  kasi-dasu (lend-let.out), hasi-komu (lend-let.in), kasi-tukeru (lend-attach),
        *kasi-ireru (throw-let.into) (cf. kari-ireru (borrow-let.into)) …

This class of verbs is subject to the animacy constraint. In nominal compounds, the dative phrase cannot be replaced with *made* ‘up to’, (and marginally with *e* ‘to’).

(39) John-wa Mary-ni/(?)?-e/*-made hon-o ut-ta.
    John-TOP Mary-DAT/-to/-up.to book-ACC sell-PAST
    ‘John sold a book to Mary.’
(40) John-ga {Mary-ni/*uti-ni} hon-o ut-ta.
    John-NOM Mary-DAT/home-DAT book-ACC sold-PAST
    ‘John gave {Mary/his home} a book.’

In reciprocal nominals, the original dative phrase is marked with *to* ‘with’, but not *e* ‘to’ or *kara*.

(41) a.  Mary-to-no/*-kara-no/*-e-no (hon-no) uri-kai
        Mary-with-GEN/-from-GEN/-to-GEN book-GEN sell-buy
        ‘selling and buying of books with Mary’
    b.  Mary-to-no/*-kara-no/?*-e-no (hon-no) kasi-kari
        Mary-with-GEN/from-GEN/to-GEN book-GEN lending-renting
        ‘lending and renting of books with Mary’

The properties (39) through (41) show that the dative argument of a verb of commercial transaction is subject to the animacy constraint.

(42) 

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<th>C-of-P verbs</th>
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Conclusion

Japanese ditransitive verbs are partitioned into the two major classes of change-of-possession and change-of-location verbs. The former has the syntactic frame of the double object construction, but the latter, the postpositional object construction. The dative arguments of change-of-possession verbs, but not of change-of-location verbs, are constrained by the animacy constraint. But this constraint extends to the goal arguments of verbs of commercial transaction, which is syntactically classed as postpositional object construction.

Selected Bibliography


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