

# The Domain of Transitivity

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## I

In discussing universality phenomena among different languages in contrastive analysis, it is not sufficient to pay attention only to their surface structures. Some resemblances and similarities on the surface do not necessarily offer the essential keys to lead to a successful contrastive description. After we have observed and examined the outer, or the surface phenomena, we have to plunge into the inner, or the deep territory of the given linguistic structure. By collecting investigations of both surface and deep structures, particularly when the interplays of these two structures are revealed, a more adequate description will be achieved.

In my recent papers<sup>1</sup> I proposed a potential way for description of some equivalent English and Japanese verbs in connection with their case valence and transitivity. The verbs I discussed then were pure transitive verbs that require one object in an SVO sentence.

## II

As I pointed out in those papers, some verbs in English and Japanese with similar semantic domains function quite similarly in their syntactic structures. In the present paper I would like to continue with my

speculation regarding verbs in English and Japanese that constitute the so-called double object constructions.

Like the pairs of verbs such as "OPEN" and "AK-" which share common syntactic functions in many ways, the verbs I will pick up this time also share many features. However, they are different in the following points:

1. The domain of transitivity
2. The selection of the actant<sup>2</sup>
3. The semantic aspect

I would like to focus mainly on point 1 above, and investigate the other two points when they are relevant to the first.

There also exist some interesting facts regarding intransitivity and transitivity phenomena of some equivalent pairs. However, my speculation about them will be introduced at other time.

### III

First of all, I would like to introduce the following pairs of verbs:

English	{	Intransitive: heal
		Transitive: heal
Japanese	{	Intransitive: naoru
		Transitive: naosu

as used in the examples:

- (1) The disease healed. (Intransitive)
- (2) The doctor healed the disease. (Transitive)

and their counterparts:

- (3) Byooki ga naotta. (Intransitive)  
 (4) Isya ga byooki o naosita. (Transitive)

As indicated above, these two pairs of verbs function quite similarly on the surface. However, an interesting change arises when the same structures are expanded with some additional adverb phrases. The equivalent verbs “naoru/naosu” and “heal” do function in a quite similar manner. Let me examine the English example with an instrumental actant.

- (5) The doctor healed the disease with the medicine.

But if I expand this into a different construction with “John” as “the patient”<sup>3</sup> I get an ungrammatical sentence:

- (6) \*The doctor healed John the disease with the medicine.

Although (6) seems to have an SVOO construction, the transitive verb “heal” does not function like other ordinary transitive verbs that make the double object construction. But with a benefactive phrase “for John” after the object “disease” a good grammatical sentence is obtained.

- (7) The doctor healed the disease for John with the medicine.

With a genitivized phrase “John’s,” we get the following sentence:

- (8) The doctor healed John’s disease with the medicine.

which is also acceptable. Consider the passive counterpart next:

- (9) John was healed (the disease) by the doctor with the medicine.

Where was the grammatical subject “John” obtained from? It is conceivable that it was either from

- (10) The doctor healed the disease for John with the medicine.  
[same as (7)]

or

- (11) The doctor healed John's disease with the medicine. [same  
as (8)]

If (9) is the fruit of (10) obtained by passivization, it may be considered that the verb "heal" is not a so-called dative verb, but a verb that requires a benefactive phrase in the required structure. Moreover, if (9) was obtained from (11), then it is observable that "heal" is proven to be a peculiar verb. It does not belong either to the dative verb group such as "give," "lend," *etc.* nor to the benefactive verb such as "buy" as the following sentences exemplify:

- (12) John was given a camera by Betty.  
(13) John was lent a book by Jean.  
(14) \*John was bought a car by his father.

Since the passive construction

- (15) John was healed by the doctor with the medicine.

is acceptable, how can the peculiarity of the verb's function be explained? If the grammatical subject (and at the same time, the patient) "John" was obtained from (11), then a new type of transformation as the framework to generate (15) from (11) is absolutely necessary.<sup>4</sup> However, this is a psychological process rather than a syntactic process, and so requires further speculation.

#### IV

Next, let me compare the description given above with some Japa-

nese counterparts. In Japanese also, the dative construction

- (16)  $\frac{*Isya\ ga}{[SUB]} \frac{Taroo\ ni}{[I.O]} \frac{byooki\ o}{[D.O]} \frac{sono\ kusuri\ de}{[INST]} \frac{naosita.}{[V: TRNS]}$   
 (\*The doctor healed Taroo the disease with the medicine.)

is as unacceptable as the English counterpart.

- (17) \*The doctor healed Taroo the disease with the medicine.

However, with a benefactive phrase “Taroo no tame ni (for Taroo)” this construction becomes acceptable

- (18)  $\frac{Isya\ ga}{[SUB]} \frac{Taroo\ no\ tame\ ni}{[BENEF]} \frac{byooki\ o}{[D.O]} \frac{naosita.}{[V: TRNS]}$

just as the English counterpart with a benefactive phrase<sup>5</sup> is.

- (19) The doctor healed the disease for John with the medicine.  
 [same as (10)]

It is also curious that the Japanese genitivized counterpart of (11), namely the following sentence:

- (20)  $\frac{Isya\ ga}{[SUB]} \frac{Taroo\ no}{[GEN]} \frac{byooki\ o}{[D.O]} \frac{Sono\ kusuri\ de}{[INST]} \frac{naosita.}{[V: TRNS]}$

is also acceptable, and its passive counterpart in Japanese:

- (21)  $\frac{Taroo\ wa}{[SUB: TOP]} \frac{isya\ ni}{[AGET]} \frac{byooki\ o}{[D.O]} \frac{sono\ kusuri\ de}{[INST]}$   
 naositemoratta.  
 [V: TRNS; PASSV]

is perfectly acceptable.

TOP=topicalized

AGET=agentive

PASSV=passivized

Notice the passive counterparts of (11) and (20) respectively are also acceptable:

(22) John's disease was healed by the doctor with the medicine.

(23)  $\frac{\text{Taroo no}}{[\text{GEN}]}$   $\frac{\text{byooki wa}}{[\text{SUB: PAT; TOP}]}$   $\frac{\text{isya ni}}{[\text{AGENT}]}$   $\frac{\text{sono kusuri de}}{[\text{INST}]}$   
 $\frac{\text{naositemoratta.}}{[\text{V: TRNS; PASSV}]}$

PAT=patient

This fact may reveal that there exist some common features between the English and Japanese transitive verbs "heal" and "naosu."

## V

In this section, let me examine the transitivity of the English verb "heal" further, together with other features where necessary. First of all, let me list some relevant examples to start my discussion.

(24) The doctor healed the disease.

(25) The doctor healed John.

(26) The doctor healed John's disease.

(27) The doctor healed the disease with the medicine.

(28) The doctor healed John with the medicine.

(29) The doctor healed the disease for John with the medicine.

However, as already indicated above,

(30) \*The doctor healed John the disease with the medicine.

is unacceptable.

Next, let me list up passive counterparts of the above:

- (24') The disease was healed by the doctor.  
 (25') John was healed by the doctor.  
 (26') John's disease was healed by the doctor.  
 (27') The disease was healed by the doctor with the medicine.  
 (28') John was healed by the doctor with the medicine.  
 (29') The disease was healed for John by the doctor with the medicine.

However, just as the active sentence (30) is unacceptable,

- (30') \*John was healed the disease by the doctor with the medicine.

is an unacceptable sentence.

And, with the instrumental NP as the grammatical subject, the following sentences:

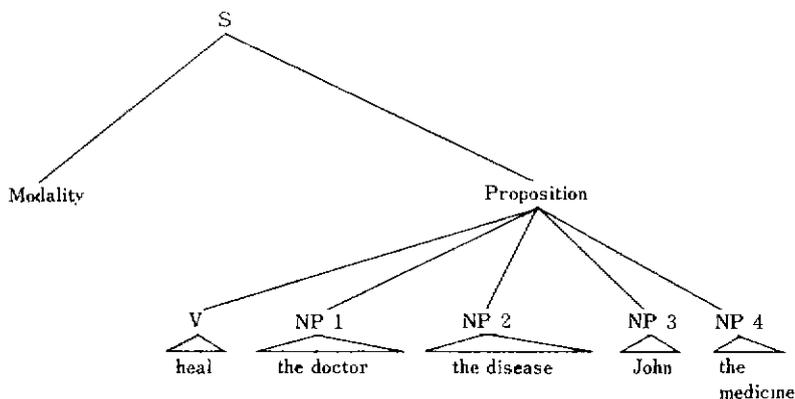
- (31) The medicine healed the disease.  
 (32) The medicine healed John.

are both acceptable, and still more, their passive counterparts:

- (33) The disease was healed with the medicine.  
 (34) John was healed with the medicine.

are also acceptable.

The four NPs in the given structures might be illustrated in the following diagram:



The specialization of these four NPs will be described as follows:

NP 1: “the doctor” as Subject or Agent as in

(35) The doctor healed the disease.

(36) The doctor healed John.

(37) The disease }  
 John } was healed by the doctor.

NP 2: “the disease” as Direct Object or Goal as in (35) and (37).

NP 3: “John” as Direct Object and Patient as in

(38) The doctor healed John.

(39) John was healed by the doctor.

However, not as Indirect Object as in

(40) \*The doctor healed John the disease.

Although good as an NP in the benefactive phrase as in (29).

NP 4: “the medicine” in the instrumental phrase and also as Subject in (33) and (34); (31) and (32).

In English the transitive verbs are roughly divided into two subclasses

as to the so-called double object construction :

Group 1 : give, lend, read, write, *etc.*

Group 2 : buy, get, have, lose, obtain, sell, *etc.*<sup>7</sup>

Some examples may illustrate their difference :

(41) John gave Tom a camera.

(42) John lent Jim a bicycle.

(43) John read Bill a story.

(44) John wrote Jane a letter.

and with "buy"

(45) John bought Ted a camera.

but the sentences (41), (42), (43), and (44) can be rewritten into sentences using a "to+NP" phrase as illustrated in the following examples :

(42') John lent a bicycle to Jim.

(44') John wrote a letter to Jane.

Whereas, regarding (45), the rewritten version :

(45') \*John bought a camera to Ted.

is not acceptable. Instead of the preposition "to," (45') must have "for."<sup>8</sup> Thus the correct revision is

(46) John bought a camera for Ted.

Now, the verb in question "heal" resembles "buy" where it requires a benefactive phrase "for John" instead of a directional phrase "to John" in

(47) The doctor healed the disease for John.

The verb "heal" does not allow a double object construction as

(48) \*The doctor healed John the disease.

In this point, the English verb "heal" resembles the Japanese counterpart "naosu" as observed in the following examples:

(49) \*Isya ga Taroo ni byooki o naosita.

Although (49) is not acceptable,

(50) Isya ga Taroo no tame ni byooki o naosita.

is acceptable. In this a benefactive phrase "no tame ni" is chosen instead of "ni." Also the genitivized versions are commonly acceptable both in English and Japanese as in

(51) The doctor healed John's disease.

(52) Isya ga Taroo no byooki o naosita.

## VI

Considering those facts I have discussed so far, I may have to conclude that the binary division of double object transitive verbs is not adequate either in English or Japanese. Perhaps the following new categorization would be more adequate from the standpoint of universality theory.

Group 1: { English: give, lend, read, write, *etc.*  
 { Japanese: ageru, kasu, yomu, kaku, *etc.*

Group 2: { English: buy, get, have, sell, *etc.*  
 { Japanese: kau, eru, motu, uru, *etc.*

Group 3: { English: heal  
 { Japanese: naosu

My discussion also reveals the fact that the English verbs "buy" and "heal" are both transitive verbs that seem to share some similar functions in their distributional features of the actants they accompany and in their case structures, but they are quite different in their dative formation; whereas, in Japanese, the transitive verbs "kau" and "naosu" function in exactly the same way, *i.e.* they share some identical distributional features. Especially, in Japanese, the verbs "kau" and "naosu" both allow the dative construction as in,

- (53) Taroo wa Ziroo ni okasi o katta.  
 =(Taroo wa Ziroo no tame ni okasi o katta.)

Although these Japanese verbs in Groups 1, 2, and 3 all admit sentences if they have a benefactive phrase "no tame ni" instead of simply "ni," English verbs in Group 1 never allow a construction with a benefactive phrase "for NP." An interesting fact is that English and Japanese verbs in Group 3 share more similarities in their functions and features. In summary,

1. No double object construction by word order is admitted.
2. A benefactive phrase is necessary to give the correct reading.

The fact that the Japanese benefactive phrase "no tame ni" can be used in the English counterparts even where no English benefactive phrase is admitted may show that the domain of transitivity of the Japanese transitive verbs is much more generous and broader than in their English counterparts.

I would like to propose that the three-way division of English transitive verbs would better explain their features, since it has been revealed that the division of the English double object transitive verbs into two

groups is not adequate. There must be hidden some more mysterious interactions undiscovered regarding the functions of the whole verb system.

### Notes

- 1 Teruhiro Ishiguro, "Case in Deep Structure," *Doshisha Studies in English*, Nos. 47-48, March, 1989. "The Interplay of Case and Aspect" *Doshisha Studies in English*, No. 50, October, 1989.
- 2 An Actant is an NP accompanied by case function which appears in a sentence marked or unmarked in English, but always as marked in Japanese. This term was first introduced by Lucien Tesnière in his *Elements de Syntaxe Structurale* (Paris: Editions Klincksieck, 1982) p. 102, pp. 105-115. Charles J. Fillmore mentions this notion in terms of what he calls potential case of each NP in a sentence. "The Case for Case," Emmon Bach and Robert Harms (eds.), *Universals in Linguistic Theory* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968) pp. 1-90.
- 3 The terms Patient, Agent, Goal, etc. are those introduced by Charles J. Fillmore, "The Case for Case."
- 4 This type of transformation will be fully examined and described in my next paper, "The Case-Shifting Transformation" (to appear in March, 1990).
- 5 The term "benefactive phrase" is from Charles J. Fillmore's *Indirect Object Constructions in English and the Ordering of Transformation* (The Hague: Mouton & Co., 1965).
- 6 Cf. Note 3 on this page.
- 7 These verbs were selected by the author from the list in Walter A. Cook, S. J., *Case Grammar, Development of the Matrix Model* (Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 1979) pp. 208-211.
- 8 The English verb "buy" accompanies the case preposition "for" instead of "to" in the structure [buy+NP(Obj)+\_\_\_NP]. Walter A. Cook, S. J., lists this verb as "transitive, ABO" i.e. this is accompanied by Agent, Benefactive, and Object NPs. Walter A. Cook, S. J., *Case Grammar, Development of the Matrix Model*, *ibid.* p. 208.