

When Passives Mean Adversative

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This study will be concerned with the adversity of Japanese passive sentences. As is well-known, a direct passive like (1a) and a transitive indirect passive like (1b) may be interpreted either as *adversative* or as *nonadversative*, while an intransitive indirect passive like (1c) can only have the adversative sense.

- (1) a. Hanako₁-ga sensei-ni e₁ sikar-/home-rare-ta.
Nom teacher-by scold/prais-Pass-Past
'Hanako was scolded/praised by the teacher.'
- b. Hanako-ga sensei-ni kodomo-o sikar-/home-rare-ta.
child-Acc
'Hanako had her child scolded/praised by the teacher.'
- c. Hanako-ga otto-ni sin-are-ta.
husband-by dead-Pass-Past
'Hanako lost her husband.'

The question of why some passives are either adversative or nonadversative, but others are only adversative has not been taken up so seriously in previous studies except those by Kuno (1983), Washio (1993), and Wierzbicka (1979). Though these predecessors may have deepened the understanding of the adversity of passives, their specific analyses give rise to difficulties. For lack of space, I will confine myself to the proposal made by Washio.

Washio argues that passive sentences are adversative if there is no semantic/pragmatic relation between subject and direct object. It follows from this analysis that (1c) can only be adversative. And the adversity of the passive which does not meet the above condition is assumed to be attributed to a verb meaning. Thus, sentences (1a, b) are adversative if the passive verb based on the stem *sikar-*; but they are nonadversative if *home-* appears instead. This is because *sikar-*, unlike *home-*, describes a situation which we normally conceive to be unpleasant.

On closer inspection, it turns out that Washio's analysis fails to account for such sentences as (2).

- (2) Taroo-ga tokoya-ni kami-o kir-are-ta.
Nom barber-by hair-Acc cut-Pass-Past

'Taro was adversely affected by the barber's cutting his hair.'

This sentence suggests that Taro felt that he had been injured by the barber; it does not mean 'Taro had his hair cut.' Since *kami* is understood to be Taro's in (2), the adversity of the sentence by definition must be due to the verb meaning. However, the verb *kir-* in itself does not seem to have any adversative sense as part of its inherent meaning. Where does the adversity of (2) come from?

Of course, we can circumvent this problem by assuming that *kir-* is adversative *per se*. But if this is so, then it is predicted incorrectly that the verb invariably entails adversity. Note that the adversity of any passive sentence can be cancelled out in one way or another.

- (3) Taroo-wa sensei-ni sikar-are-te, musiro yorokon-de i-ru.
 Nom teacher-by scold-Pass-Conj rather please be-Pres
 'Taro was scolded by the teacher, but rather he is pleased with that.'

This fact leads to the conclusion that adversity is a kind of meaning which is drawn from invited inference (cf. Geis and Zwicky, 1971).

My proposal is (i) that Japanese passives have the meaning which can be paraphrased by "X gets involved in a spontaneous event," which suggests X's embarrassment, and (ii) that if it is implied that as a result of the occurrence, X loses something that can be conceived to belong to X (e.g., concrete objects like a wallet, abstract objects like a good name, body parts like hair, persons like parents, etc.), then X will be understood to be damaged.

References

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