

A Semantic Analysis of the Cognate Object Construction

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This research deals with the cognate object construction, which is exemplified by the following:

- (1) a. Sam smiled a silly smile.
 b. Sam danced a merry dance.

Since the object shares the same or similar form as its main verb, it has been called the cognate object (hereafter, CO). All of the cognate object construction does not necessarily show the same syntactic behavior. For example, (1a) cannot be passivized as in (2a) while (1b) can as in (2b):

- (2) a. *A silly smile was smiled by Sam. (Jones (1988:91))
 b. A merry dance was danced by Sam. (Jones (1988:91))

Why does the cognate object construction show such a different syntactic behavior? In this research, we claim that the syntactic behavior of the cognate object construction corresponds to the semantic function of the CO and that the construction is divided into two types.

It has been pointed out that the CO counts as an adjunct or an argument based on whether the verb is intransitive or transitive and that the CO can be passivized when it is an argument. Following this proposal, we may give an account of the different syntactic behavior shown in (2): (1a) cannot be passivized while (1b) can since *a silly smile* in (1a) is the adjunct CO and *a merry dance* in (1b) the argument CO.

However, we encounter difficulties when following this proposal that the verb determines whether the CO is an adjunct or an argument. Let us consider the verb *live* as an example. The verb *live* has been analyzed as an intransitive verb and hence its CO cannot be passivized as shown in (3).

- (3) *An uneventful life was lived by Harry. (Jones (1988:91))

Contrary to the above, there is an example in which the CO of the verb *live* can be passivized:

- (4) A good life was lived by Susan.

Although the verb *live* has been analyzed as an intransitive verb, unlike (3), *a good life* is passivized. Moreover, there is another example in which the CO can be passivized though the verb has been analyzed as an intransitive verb. As in (5), unlike (2a), the CO of the verb *smile* can be passivized:

- (5) Marilyn Monroe's smile was smiled by Mary.

If we consider that the verb determines whether the CO is an adjunct or an argument, we cannot explain why the CO of the same verb can be passivized on the one hand and cannot on the other hand. In order to answer the question, we need to examine the semantic function of the adjunct CO and the argument CO.

Let us consider the semantic function of the CO. The semantic function of the adjunct CO is different from that of the argument CO. The adjunct CO expresses the manner of the event described by the verb:

- (6) a. Mary smiled a beautiful smile. = Mary smiled beautifully.

(Matsumoto (1996:199))

- b. The girls danced a nervous dance. = The girls dances nervously.

As shown above, *a beautiful smile* and *a nervous dance* can be paraphrased into a manner adverbial, *beautifully* and *nervously*, respectively. Thus, the adjunct CO functions as a manner adverbial modifying the event described by the verb.

On the other hand, the argument CO expresses what the event described by the verb creates and functions as a direct object that has a specific reference. A brief look at the following pair of examples:

- (7) a. Mary danced an exotic dance. She danced *it* because he was truly amused by her joke

- b. He lived a happy trouble-free life. He could live *it* because his wife took care of all the difficulties.

(Takami & Kuno (2002:149))

As shown above, *an exotic dance* and *a happy trouble-free life* can be replaced with *it*. Thus, the argument CO functions as a direct object that refers to what the event described by the verb creates.

From the above facts, we claim that the syntactic behavior of the cognate object construction corresponds to the semantic function of CO. When functioning as a manner adverbial, the CO is neither passivized nor replaced with *it*. On the other hand, when functioning as a direct object that has a specific reference, the CO can be passivized and replaced with *it*. With this in mind, let us return to (4) and (5). *A good life* in (4) cannot be paraphrased into *well* as in (8) and *Marilyn Monroe's smile* in (5) can be replaced with *it* as in (9).

- (8) Susan lived a good life. ≠ Susan lived well.

- (9) Mary smiled Marilyn Monroe's smile. Nancy smiled *it*, too.

These facts clearly show that *a good life* and *Marilyn Monroe's smile* function as a direct object and that the syntactic behavior as shown in (4)-(5) corresponds to the semantic function of the CO.

We can conclude from what has been discussed above that the syntactic behavior of the cognate object construction corresponds to the semantic function of the CO and that the construction is divided into two types: One type has the adjunct CO that functions as a manner adverbial. The other type has the argument CO that functions as a direct object. In consequence, we can explain why the CO of the same verb shows different syntactic behavior.