Semantic divergence of -(r)are: From a different perspective

DAVID Y. OSHIMA

1. Introduction

The Japanese passive morpheme -(r)are (-(r)ar in classical Japanese) has four distinct uses that are historically related: passive, spontaneous, potential (ability), and honorific. Although the path and driving force of this divergence have been widely discussed and to some extent clarified by traditional Japanese grammarians (Karashima 1993; Kuginuki 1991; Onoe 1998/9 among others), on several points consensus and satisfactory accounts have not been reached yet.

This paper addresses the paths through which the meaning of -(r)are diverged, under the new light posed by the analysis of the Japanese passive by Oshima (2002), who proposes that the core meaning of the Japanese passive is the triadic relation of “lack of control”. Namely, I argue (i) that the relation between the spontaneous and the passive can be captured in terms of the relation between “general” and “particular”, (ii) that the proposed analysis of the spontaneous construction gives a straightforward account of its development into the potential use, and (iii) that the proposed analysis of the spontaneous construction gives support to the hypothesis that the honorific emerged from the spontaneous.

2. The Four Uses of -(R)are

In this section I provide an overview of the four uses of -(r)are in modern and classical Japanese. I also illustrate the analysis of the Japanese passive, which
is adopted here and which plays an important role in the following discussion.

2.1. Passive

It is well known that the Japanese passive is “non-canonical”, in that it allows so-called possessive and indirect passives. In the literature, it has been commonly assumed (i) that two or more types of passives (direct/possessive/indirect etc.) must be postulated to explain various facts related to the construction, and (ii) that the “indirect” passive lexically implies an adversative effect caused by the described event on the referent of the subject (Kuno 1973; Gunji 1987; Uda 1994 among others). Alleged varieties of the Japanese passive are exemplified below, with corresponding active sentences (if any):

(1) direct passive
   a. Max-ga Pat-ni nagur-are-ta.
      Max-Nom Pat-Dat hit-RARE-Past
      ‘Max was hit by Pat.’
   b. Pat-ga Max-o nagut-ta.
      Pat-Nom Max-o hit-Past

(2) possessive passive
   a. Max-i-ga Pat-ni (zibun,-no) musuko-o nagur-are-ta.
      Max-Nom Pat-Dat self-Gen son-Acc hit-RARE-Past
      ‘Max had his son hit by Pat.’
   b. Pat-ga Max-no musuko-o nagut-ta.
      Pat-Nom Max-Gen son-Acc hit-Past

(3) indirect passive
   Max-ga Pat-ni John-o nagu-rare-ta.
   Max-Nom Pat-Dat John-Acc hit-RARE-Past
   ‘Pat hit John on Max.’

Among the three types illustrated above, only the direct passive has the basic characteristics of a cross-linguistically canonical passive, involving “promotion” of an object of the stem to subject and “demotion” of the subject of the stem into a peripheral function marked by an oblique case, -ni.

In Oshima (2002), I argued that a uniform account of Japanese passives is possible and plausible. I proposed that the core semantics of the Japanese passive is the triadic relation of “lack of control” among an agent, undergoer and event; a simplified lexical representation of a passive verb, formalized in the framework of HPSG (Head-driven Phrase Structure Grammar; Pollard and Sag 1994), is given as follows:
This analysis provides a straightforward account of the adversative effect implicature induced by the indirect passive. The account goes as follows: For a statement of the form: “an event P is out of x’s control” to be felicitous, there must be some pragmatically significant relation between P and x; i.e. it must be the case either (i) that x is directly or indirectly involved in P, or (ii) that P causes some effect on x. In case (ii), the effect is usually construed as an adversative one by the inference that: “when an uncontrolled event has some effect on an individual, that effect tends to be a bad one”.  

According to this analysis, the semantics of the Japanese passive morpheme -(r)are is antonymous to the causative morpheme -(s)ase, whose core semantics is (the triadic relation of) “exert (positive) control”, and whose morphological properties are symmetrical to those of -(r)are (cf. Kuginuki 1

---

1 The following data illustrate this point:

(i) a. That Patricia nominated him as her heir was out of Max’s control.
   
   \[ + \rightarrow \text{“Max was adversely affected.”} \]

   b. That Patricia nominated his son as her heir was out of Max’s control.
   
   \[ + \rightarrow \text{“Max was adversely affected.”} \]

   c. That Patricia nominated John as her heir was out of Max’s control.
   
   \[ + \rightarrow \text{“Max was adversely affected.”} \]

These three sentences semantically correspond to the three types of passives given in (ii). Importantly, the adversative effect on the individual to whom the absence of control force is attributed, in this example, Max, arises only when he is not directly or indirectly participating in the subordinate event.

(ii) a. Max-wa Patricia-ni soozokunin-to-site simei-s-are-ta.
   Max-Top Patricia-Dat heir-as nominate-Pass-Past

   b. Max-wa Patricia-ni musuko-o soozokunin-to-site simei-s-are-ta.
   Max-Top Patricia-Dat son-Acc heir-as nominate-Pass-Past

   c. Max-wa Patricia-ni John-o soozokunin-to-site simei-s-are-ta.
   Max-Top Patricia-Dat John-Acc heir-as nominate-Pass-Past
1991:15). The semilattice diagram below illustrates the relation between the causative and the passive in a lucid way; the meaning of the passive, lack-control-relation, is a sister type of the supertype of the meaning of the causative (positive-exert-control-relation).

(5)

![Semilattice Diagram]

2.2. Spontaneous

The spontaneous construction in modern Japanese is used to depict situations where certain thoughts, attitudes, mental states etc. are brought about to some agent’s (typically the speaker’s) mind by virtue of environments/situations.

(6) Mukasi-ga sinob-are-ru.
   old.time-Nom think.about-RARE-Pres
   ‘Old times come to mind.’

(7) Kokyoo-no haha-no koto-ga omoidas-are-ru.
   hometown-Gen mother-Gen fact-Nom recall-RARE-Pres
   ‘I can’t help remembering my mother in my hometown.’

The case-marking pattern of the spontaneous in modern Japanese is similar to that of the passive; also, only those verbs that denote psychological or perceptional activities/states have spontaneous forms.

At earlier stages of Japanese, namely up to the Chuuko stage (approx. A.D. 794–1192), in contrast, spontaneous forms (with -(ra)y and -(ra)r; see below) can be formed with a wider variety of stem verbs, and do not affect the argument pattern of the base verb.

For example, in (8), where the base verb is *mau* ‘dance’, the actor is not demoted to a peripheral function and marked by the particle -ni, as in the case of the passive. In (9), the perceived theme of the event of surprising, which is the sound of wind, is not promoted to subject (see Onoe 2003, 1998/9; Shibatani 2000).

2 The Japanese causative can mean either causation (factitive causation) or permission (permissive causation), and thus can be understood as their semantic supertype.
Semantic divergence of -(r)are: From a different perspective / 5

(8) Kikoribito-domo-mo kokoronarazu maw-are-keri.
wood.cutter-Pl-also involuntarily dance-RAR-Past
‘Wood cutters too danced willy-nilly.’
(Konjaku Monogatari, vol.28; 11c)

(9) Kaze-no oto-ni-zo odorok-are-nuru.
wind-Gen sound-at-Emph be.surprised-RAR-Perf
‘(I) got surprised at the sound of the wind.’
(Kokin Wakashu, 169; 10c)

2.3. Potential (Ability)

In modern Japanese, only vowel-final verbs (so-called ichidan doosi) and kuru ‘come’ can form a potential form with -(r)are.

(10) Taro-wa doko-demo sugu-ni ne-rare-ru.
Taro-Top wherever soon sleep-RARE-Pres
‘Taro is able to fall asleep at once, wherever he is.’

(11) Tenki-ga waruku-te ko-rare-nakat-ta.
weather-Nom bad-Gerund come-RARE-Neg-Past
‘(I/You/He) could not come because of the bad weather.’

Consonant-final verbs (godan doosi), on the other hand, gradually lost their potential forms with -(r)are from the Muromachi to Meiji periods (during 14–20c), and instead obtained new potential forms (kanoo doosi ‘potential verbs’, e.g. hanaseru, kakeru).

Recently, potential verbs derived from vowel-final verbs (ichidan dooshi) and kuru, which are called ra-nuki (‘ra dropping’) -forms, began to be used, in various areas, dialects, and registers; e.g. nereru, koreru). This change can be explained as the process in which (i) potential verbs derived from vowel-ending verbs arose in favor of explicitness (mitigation of ambiguity), (ii) ra-nuki forms are arising in favor of explicitness and the symmetry of the paradigm (see Inoue 1998; Kinsui 2003). Whereas potential verbs derived from consonant-final verbs are now considered a part of the normative usage, ra-nuki forms have not been accepted in formal registers.

2.4. Honorific

Japanese has a rich system of honorific verb morphology (cf. Kikuchi 1994; Nishida 1987). The V-(r)are form can be used to manifest the speaker’s high esteem of the referent of the subject.

(12) a. Sensei-ga hon-o kat-ta.
teacher-Nom book-Acc buy-Past
‘The teacher bought a book.’
b. Sensei-ga hon-o kaw-are-ta.
   teacher-Nom book-Loc buy-RARE-Past
   ‘The teacher bought a book. (hon.)’

This use of the V-(r)are form is synonymous to o-V-ninaru (e.g. Sensei-ga hon-o o-kai-ninat-ta), except that the former is considered to be more formal.

3. Diachronic Relations among the Four Uses

This section explores how the meaning of -(r)are and its predecessors diverged.

3.1. Overview

The morpheme -(ra)r (the direct predecessor of -(r)are) arose at the beginning of the Chuuko stage (around A.D. 800), taking over -(ra)y, which already exhibited three distinct uses: passive, spontaneous and potential. The emergence of the causative ending -(sa)s took place at the same period, which took over the old form -sim (Kuginuki 1991; Minegishi 1968).

(13) \[
\begin{array}{ccc}
\text{passive etc.} & \text{causative} \\
-(ra)y & -sim & \text{early Chuuko (around A.D. 800)} \\
\downarrow & \downarrow & \downarrow \\
-(ra)r & -(sa)s & \text{late Kinsei (Edo period)} \\
\downarrow & \downarrow & \downarrow \\
-(r)are & -(s)ase & \\
\end{array}
\]

The passive and spontaneous uses of -(r)are are said to be oldest among the four uses; the ambiguity is present in the oldest records available (Kuginuki 1991; Hashimoto 1969). The potential use of -(ra)y/(ra)r was limited in negative contexts until the end of Heian period (A.D. 794-1192); the tendency that the potential construction occurs with negation continued from the Chu-sei period (A.D. 1192-1573) onward. The honorific use arose in the Heian period, but it was then subject to certain stylistic constraints (Karashima 1993).

3.2. Passive to Spontaneous, or Spontaneous to Passive?

In the literature, there is no consensus as to which of the passive and spontaneous uses is prior. Shibatani (2000) proposes that the passive arose from the spontaneous; the reasoning is as follows:

(i) The basic function of the spontaneous construction is to defocus the volitionality/intention of the thematic agent.

(ii) This leads to the rearrangement of the case marking pattern: the thematic agent in the spontaneous came not to be realized as the subject, whereas the theme argument was “promoted” and came to be ga- (nominative-) marked.
(iii) As a result, the spontaneous form developed into an (inchoative-like) intransitive form, which in turn developed into a passive form that could accompany an agent realized as a peripheral function.

Shibatani’s hypothesis assumes that the Japanese passive is “de-transitivized” or argument-decrementing. As mentioned in Section 2.1, however, the Japanese passive is argument-incrementing rather than argument-decrementing. For this reason, I believe it is unlikely that the passive arose from an intransitive, inchoative form (on a par with the passives in Spanish, Russian etc.; see Haspelmath 1990).

An alternative analysis I propose here is that the relation between the spontaneous and the passive can be interpreted as the one between “general” and “particular”. In a passive construction, the absence of control force is attributed to a particular individual, namely the referent of the (matrix) subject; on the other hand, in a spontaneous the control force is just absent in the relevant environment.

(14) a. Format of the passive construction:

```
passive-stem
HEAD verb
ARG-ST <NP[NOM]i, NP[DAT]j, <PROj, ... >>
CONTENT
  lack-control-rel
    ACTOR i
    UNDERGOER j
  relation
    EVENT
      ... j
      ... ...
```

b. Format of the spontaneous construction:

```
spontaneous-stem
HEAD verb
ARG-ST <NP[NOM]i, ... >
CONTENT
  general-lack-control-rel
    relation
      EVENT
        ... i
        ... ...
```

According to this analysis, the relation between the spontaneous and the passive is to some extent reminiscent of the one between the existential and the possessive, which are often encoded by the same form, as in the Japanese aru construction and the French avoir construction:
(15) a. (Tukue-no desk-Gen top-Loc book-Nom be.Pres
‘There is a book (on the desk).’

b. Taro-ni [musuko-ga aru]. (possession)
Taro-Dat son-Nom be.Pres
‘Taro has a son.’

(16) a. Il y a un livre. (existence)
it(expl.) there have a book
‘There is a book.’

b. Il a un livre. (possession)
he have a book
‘He has a book.’

That is, possession can be metaphorically construed as existence particularized to a certain agent, and vice versa (Kageyama 1996, Freeze 1992; cf. Tham 2003).

What bearings does this analysis have on the directionality between the passive and spontaneous? To my knowledge, the semantic extension from particular to general and that from general to particular are both commonly attested (e.g. possession→existence, existence→possession), and thus the analysis above does not provide a decisive hint on the directionality in either way.

3.3. Spontaneous to Potential

It has been widely acknowledged that the potential use arose from the spontaneous use. Shibatani (1985) remarks: ‘It is only one small step from the spontaneous to the potential. An event that occurs spontaneously has a strong propensity to happen. If this automatic happening is negated, then a reading of impotentiality is implied. [. . . ] A generalization of the spontaneous/potential correlation leads to the positive potential reading of an agent-defocusing form, as in Japanese.’ (see also Shibatani 2000:171).

The analysis of the spontaneous proposed above provides a straightforward account of the process through which it led to the meaning of ‘(im)potentiality’. The negation of an event of the form “there is no external control on the occurrence of P” is logically equivalent to “there is some external control on the occurrence of P”. The external control can be either positive (i.e. “some external force made/let it happen that P”) or negative (i.e. “some external force blocks it from happening that P”):

(17) \neg (\text{GENERAL-}\text{LACK-}\text{CONTROL} (P)) =
\text{GENERAL-}\text{POSITIVE-}\text{CONTROL} (P) \lor 
\text{GENERAL-}\text{NEGATIVE-}\text{CONTROL} (P)

However, the negation of a spontaneous implicates the negation of the core
(subordinate) event. For instance, the contrast in a pair of (18a) and (18b) mostly concerns the speaker’s construal of the event, rather than the truth conditional difference about the way the event was caused (Shibatani 2000:168); the negation of (18b) implicates that one did not remember the past time (hence the marginal status of (18c)).

(18)  a. Mukasi-o omoidas-ita.
     old.time-Acc recall-Past
     ‘(I) recalled old times.’
  b. Mukasi-ga omoidas-are-ta.
     old.time-Nom recall-RARE-Past
     ‘Old times came to (my) mind.’
  c. ?Mukasi-ga omoidas-are-ru koto-wa-nakat-ta-ga,
     old.time-Nom recall-RARE it.was.not.the.case-though
     mukasi-o omoidasi-ta.
     old.time-Acc recall-Past

In sum, negating the spontaneous implicates a blocking force which prohibits an event from happening. As the final step, the presence of an external blocking force leads to the meaning of impossibility, which generalizes to the potential/ability meaning that can be used in both positive and negative contexts.

3.4. Spontaneous to Honorific, or Passive to Honorific?

The honorific use arose in a relatively late stage (during the Heian period). Traditionally, the view that the honorific arose from the spontaneous has been predominant (Tokieda 1941; Minegishi 1968; Hashimoto 1969 among others). The fact that -(ra)r/-rare in their honorific use do not affect the argument pattern of the stem seems to support this hypothesis. Shibatani (2000) too takes this view and claims that the honorific use of -(ra)r is motivated by a cross-linguistically common strategy to encode honorific meaning, i.e. the avoidance of direct mention of the agent; the spontaneous construction, he claims, brings about this effect by defocusing the direct link between the honorified agent and the action. In a similar vein, Onoe (1998/9) proposes that the honorific -rare indicates the nobility of the agent by depicting an event as an emergence of a certain situation, rather than as his/her volitional action. The analysis of the spontaneous as “(general) lack of control” provides an additional motivation for the emergence of the honorific; to say that there is nothing that forces or prohibits some person’s actions readily leads to acknowledge the absolute might of that person, and thus is an appropriate way to manifest one’s respects towards him or her.

Another possibility, that the honorific is derived from the passive, is advocated by authors like Matsushita (1930), Kinoshita (1972), Karashima (1993)
and Otsubo (1993), based on different motivations. The settlement of the issue, I believe, waits for further studies.

4. Summary
This paper examined the process through which the meaning of -(r)are and its predecessors diverged. I proposed that the spontaneous and the passive shares the core meaning of “lack of control”, and that the relation between them can be understood as the one between “general” and “particular”. I also argued that the proposed analysis of the spontaneous gives a straightforward account of its development into the potential use, and that it also gives support to the hypothesis that the honorific developed from the spontaneous.

Acknowledgements
I would like to express my gratitude to Paul Kiparsky, Satoshi Kinsui, John Beavers, Peter Sells, Ivan A. Sag, and Shiao Wei Tham for valuable comments and helpful discussions. Thanks also to the participants of the 13th Japanese/Korean Linguistics Conference. Any remaining errors are my own.

References


