

The syntax of Japanese aspectual verbs

Three Japanese aspectual verbs ‘begin’, ‘continue’, and ‘finish’ have transitive and intransitive forms, and only the transitive variants take a clausal complement -- with the exception of ‘finish’, with which both take a clausal complement (1). There are interesting differences among them: a) only the transitive ‘finish’ *oe* appears to select a volitional subject (2) (Shibatani 1973), b) the transitive ‘finish’ *oe* can be passivized with an embedded verb’s argument promoted (*long passive*) but it disallows passivization in the complement (*short passive*) (3a), c) the intransitive ‘finish’ *owar* only allows *short passive* (3b), d) two other aspectual verbs, *hajime* ‘begin’ and *tsuzuke* ‘continue’, allow either passive (3c) (Nishigauchi 1993). To account for these differences, Kageyama (1993, 1999) proposes that the aspectual verbs are either control or raising, and the control ones take a complement with no subject (V’), while the raising ones take a complement with a subject (VP). Kageyama’s analysis neatly captures the differences, with an assumption that the passive must suppress an external argument (Chomsky 1981). A control verb *oe* ‘finish (tr.)’ selects its subject and takes a V’ complement; this, it is compatible with *long passive* but not *short passive*, with an external argument only in the matrix. A raising verb *owar* ‘finish (int.)’ does not select its subject and takes a VP complement. It is only compatible with *short passive* but not *long passive*, with an external argument only in the complement. Two other aspectual verbs are ambiguous between control and raising, allowing both *long* and *short passive*.

There are empirical and theoretical problems with this analysis, however. First, having a volitional subject is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for a sentence with *oe* ‘finish (tr.)’ to be grammatical (4). Second, the two main components of the analysis, the control/raising dichotomy and the difference in the complement structure, are simply stipulated. Thus it fails to explain why some aspectual verbs are only control and raising while others are ambiguous, and why there should be a difference in the complement structure between control and raising verbs. I argue instead that the differences among the aspectual verbs derive from i) their aspectual properties and ii) two positions potentially available to them in a clause. Specifically, I argue that the aspectual verbs are heads of aspect phrase (AspP) (Borer 1994, Travis 1994, McClure 1995), and an AspP may project either below or above *vP*. Assuming that causer/agent are introduced in the specifier position of *v* (Hale and Keyser 1993), if an AspP projects below *vP* (and above VP), it is interpreted as *caused* (5). If it appears above *vP*, it is interpreted as *spontaneous* (6). Yet not all aspectual verbs can appear in these two positions. The transitive ‘finish’ *oe* specifies termination with an end point, and it requires the end point linguistically encoded with a *delimiter* (Tenny 1992). Thus, it is only compatible with accomplishment. Following Borer (1994), I assume that a *delimiter* must be in Spec-head relation with the aspectual verb and it is accusative-case-licensed there. This is consistent with an assumption that accusative case is licensed outside VP (Pesetsky 1989, Johnson 1991) and it accounts for the observation that a *delimiter* must bear accusative case (7). For the delimiter licensing to take place, *oe* ‘finish (tr.)’ must appear below *vP*, where it is interpreted as *caused*. In contrast, *owar* ‘finish (int.)’ specifies termination with no specified end point, or *spontaneous termination*. As such, it occurs above *vP*, where it takes scope over an entire event, including the external argument, and does not interact with the delimiter licensing. Therefore, it is compatible with either activity or accomplishment. Lastly, the aspectual properties of *tsuzuke* ‘continue’ and *hajime* ‘begin’ are indifferent to presence/absence of a *delimiter*. Thus, they occur in either of the two positions. Now, assuming that passive is a variant of *v* (Kratzer 1994, 1996), *hajime* and *tsuzuke* are expected to allow both *long* and *short passive* because they can occur either below or above *vP* (3c). In contrast, *owar* should only allow *short passive*, as it is limited to appear above *vP* (3b), and *oe* should only allow *long passive*, appearing only below *vP* (3a). The proposed analysis derives the differences among the aspectual verbs from their different aspectual specifications and their corresponding structural positions. It is superior to the previous analysis, in which its two major components (the control/raising distinction and the complement structures between control and raising) must be stipulated.

- (1) a. Ken-ga pizza-o tabe hajime/*hajima -ta
 K-Nom pizza-Acc eat begin(tr.)/*begin(int.) -Perf
- b. Ken-ga pizza-o tabe tsuzuke/*tsuzuk -ta
 K-Nom pizza-Acc eat continue(tr.)/*continue(int.) -Perf
- c. Ken-ga pizza-o tabe oe/owar -ta
 K-Nom pizza-Acc eat finish(tr.)/finish(int.) -Perf
 ‘Ken began/continued/finished eating pizza.’
- (2) Beru-ga nari hajime/tsuzuke/owar/*oe -ta
 Bell-Nom ring begin/continue/finish(int)/finish(tr.) -Perf
 ‘The bell began/continue/finished (int.)/*finished (tr.) ringing.’
- (3) a. Sono-shosetsu-ga kak (*-are) -oe -rare -ta
 that-novel-Nom write (*-Pass) -finish(tr.) -Pass -Perf
- b. Sono-shosetsu-ga kak -are -owar (*-are) -ta
 that-novel-Nom write -Pass -finish (int.) (*-Pass) -Perf
 ‘That novel was finished (writing).’
- c. Sono-kusuri-ga tsukai (-are) hajime/tsuzuke (-rare) -ta
 that-drug-Nom use (-Pass) begin/continue (-Pass) -Perf
 ‘That drug began/continued to be used.’
- (4) a. ***Kodomo-tachi**-ga aruki -oe -ta
child-PI-Nom walk -finish -Perf
 ‘The child finished walking’ (intended) → volitional subject but ungrammatical
- b. **Hizashi**-ga yuki-o attoiumani tokashi -oe -ta
Sunshine-Nom snow-Acc instantly melt(tr) -finish -Perf
 ‘The sunshine finished melting the snow instantly.’ → the subject not volitional
- (5) [_{VP} DP (causer) [_v [_{AspP} [_{Asp} [_{VP} (DP) V] Asp]] v]] → AspP under scope of vP
- (6) [_{AspP} [_{Asp} [_{vP} DP (causer) [_v [_{VP} (DP) V] v]] Asp]] → vP under scope of AspP
- (7) Kodomo-ga sakamichi-o/*de aruki oe -ta
 child-Nom hill-acc/*at walk finish -Perf
 ‘The child finished walking (up) the hill.’

Selected References:

Borer, H. 1994. ‘The projection of arguments,’ In E. Benedicto and J. Runner (eds.), *Functional projections: University of Massachusetts occasional papers* 17, 19-48. **Johnson, K.** 1991. ‘Object positions,’ *Natural Language and Linguistic Theory* 9, 577-636. **Kageyama, T.** 1993. *Bumpo-to Gokeisei* [Grammar and word formation]. Tokyo: Hitsuji Shobo. **McClure, W.** 1995. *Syntactic Projections of the Semantics of Aspects*, Tokyo: Hitsuji Shobo. **Nishigauchi, T.** 1993. ‘Long distance passive,’ In N. Hasegawa (ed.), *Japanese syntax in comparative grammar*. Tokyo: Kuroshio. **Shibatani, M.** 1973. ‘Where morphology and syntax clash: a case in Japanese aspectual verbs,’ *Gengo Kenkyu* 64, 65-96. **Tenny, C. L.** 1992. ‘The aspectual interface hypothesis,’ In I. Sag and A. Szabolcsi (eds.) *Lexical Matters*. Stanford: CSLI.