L1-L2 asymmetry in animacy effects in the processing of Japanese relative clauses

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Using self-paced reading, this study investigated the role of head animacy in the processing of Japanese relative clauses (RCs). Second language (L2) learners whose first languages (L1) are English and Korean, and Japanese native speakers participated. The results showed that for native speakers, inanimate heads diminished the processing difficulty associated with object RCs. However, head animacy did not have an effect on L2 processing. The Korean group showed the subject-object asymmetry but no effect of head animacy. The English group did not demonstrate the effect of RC type or head animacy. The overall pattern of these results suggests that L2 learners of Japanese are not guided by syntactic and lexical-semantic information in the same way as Japanese native speakers. These findings are interpreted within the constraint-satisfaction models (MacDonald et al., 1994) and are further discussed in the light of the research concerning the transfer of L1 processing routines.

Relative tense in relative clauses

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Japanese adnominal modifiers with no overt tense markings can produce "simultaneous readings" under matrix predicates in the past tense. This article argues for the position that these adnominal phrases are not necessarily tenseless and that they can be gapped relative clauses that contain a phonetically empty present tense morpheme. The findings of this article reinforce the view presented in Ogihara (1996) and others that Japanese tense morphemes (both present and past) are instances of relative tense in the sense of Comrie (1985) and that this behavior is visible in both verb complements and adnominal modifier positions. In addition, the contention of this article indirectly refutes an alternative position, which claims the Japanese adnominal modifiers in question are tenseless phrases and do not involve gapped relative clauses (Kusumoto, 1999). I also offer a tentative and informal account of the semantic properties of the Japanese adnominal modifiers in question at the end of the article, which involve covert attitudes on the part of a salient individual who may or may not be mentioned in the sentence.

The verb doubling construction in Japanese

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Japanese has expressions such as *Basu-ga ki-ta ki-ta* 'A bus has finally come,' where the verb-tense complex (*ki-ta* 'came' in this example) is doubled. This paper concentrates on these kinds of expressions, calling them the verb doubling construction (henceforth the VDC). The aim of this paper is to investigate the syntactic structure of the VDC in Japanese. Providing five pieces of evidence that the repeated verb-tense complex occupies the head of CP, we claim that the VDC constitutes a CP structure. We further point out that the analysis proposed here strongly supports the copy theory of movement (Chomsky, 1993).

Comments on verb doubling construction in Japanese

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The analysis offered in "Verb doubling construction in Japanese" is critically reviewed. The analysis yield verb doubling construction (VCD) by moving a verb-tense complex (VTC) in T to C, and phonetically realizing both the moved VTC in C and its copy in T. The analysis suffers from various shortcomings. Among them, it relies upon a problematic formulation of Doubly Filled Comp Filter, and the analysis incorrectly predicts the possibility of VDC in embedded contexts. The present study offers a brief outline of a plausible alternative of VDC that involves a phonetically null sentence-final particle (SFP) whose phonetic content is copied from the predicate at the phonetic interface.

Aspects of scientific Japanese revealed by JECPRESE

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This study examines the language used by researchers in science and engineering, where clarity is essential. We prepared The Japanese-English Corpus of Presentations in Science and Engineering (JECPRESE) to examine how language is used in science and engineering to clearly and accurately present information. JECPRESE contains transcriptions of presentations given in Japanese and English by researchers. Analyses revealed vagueness in Japanese arising from the tendencies of the Japanese language to sometimes omit subjects and to lack specificity in conveying discourse strategies, verb tense, and mood. Such vagueness is considered to have roots in traditional Japanese society and culture that aim to maintain harmony in a community. However, in an age of global communications, this can be an obstacle to projecting an understandable message. Suggestions are made as to how to make scientific Japanese present clearer messages to a professional community based on linguistic considerations.