Chapter 8
The Word Order Flexibility in Japanese Novels:
A Dynamic Syntax Perspective

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ABSTRACT

In Japanese, whose basic word-order is S(ubject)-O(bject)-V(erb), non-verbal elements may be permuted with the restriction that such elements cannot occur post-verbally. This restriction, however, does not apply to narrative discourse, especially conversations in novels. This discourse phenomenon with post-verbal elements is called "postposing." This chapter reveals several grammatical properties of postposing based on Japanese novels, and present an explicit account in an integrated theory of grammar. More precisely, the narrative data indicate that the syntactic type of postposed element is quite diverse and that, contrary to the prevalent, opposing view, Japanese postposing is not restricted to a matrix clause. These issues are addressed within Dynamic Syntax, a cognitively realistic grammar formalism which specifies a set of constraints on building up a structure online. This architectural design formalises the incremental process of how the reader gradually updates an interpretation by parsing a postposing sentence in narrative discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Japanese has been extensively explored from diverse perspectives, ranging from linguistics, literature, psychology, sociology, cognitive science, computer science to brain science (among many other fields). In general, languages exhibit distinct characteristics depending on speech/writing genres. A type of linguistic construction which is typically observed in colloquial dialogue/discourse would be "postposing," where a non-verbal item is positioned post-verbally. This is illustrated in (1)-(3) below, taken from novels, with postposed elements being underlined. (See the Appendix for the method of citation of data and References for the list of novels cited.)

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1. *Holmes tte iu-no*, *sono-neko*
   H QUOT say-FP that-cat
   'That cat is called Holmes.' (Akagawa, 2015, p. 44)

2. *onaji-kurasu-no-Hiroki-kun-da*, *bokura-to-wa-bessekai-no*
   the.same-class-GEN-H-N.SU-COP we-and-TOP-another.world-GEN
   'He is Hiroki from our classroom, living in a different world from us.' (Asai, 2012, p. 126, adapted)

3. '*kekkoudesu*' *jya-nai-ndatte* *dakara*
   'ok' COP-NEG-FP as.I.said
   'As I said, it's not 'ok'.' (Arikawa, 2010a, p. 71)

The postposed items in these examples are the NP (Noun Phrase) *sono-neko* 'that cat' in (1), the Noun-Modifier (genitive) *boku-to-wa-bessekai-no* 'living in a different world from us' in (2), and finally the Connective *dakara* 'as I said' in (3).

The postposing phenomenon is specific to colloquial dialogue/discourse. To illustrate the point, let us briefly summarise the word order issues in Japanese. Firstly, the basic word order is S(ujbect)-O(bject)-V(erb), as in (4). According to Dryer (2013), the S-O-V order constitutes the largest group, encompassing 565 languages out of the 1377 world languages.

4. *Ken-ga sushi-o tabe-ta*
   K-NOM sushi-ACC eat-PAST
   'Ken ate sushi.'

Secondly, despite the basic order, Japanese allows non-verbal items to be permuted, with the prescriptive restriction that such items cannot be placed after a verb. So, the O-S-V order (5) is possible with the same meaning as expressed by (4). This word-permutation is called "scrambling" in linguistics (Saito, 1985).

5. [different order from (4) but (truth-conditionally) the same meaning as (4)]
   sushi-o Ken-ga tabe-ta
   sushi-ACC K-NOM eat-PAST

Thirdly, due to the prescriptive restriction aforementioned, the postposed sentence like (6) is considered to be the "wrong use of language" in formal speech/writing, although it is indeed attested in colloquial form of dialogue/discourse as has been exemplified in (1)-(3) above.

6. [prescriptively incorrect, but attested in narratives]
   Ken-ga tabe-ta, *sushi-o*
   K-NOM eat-PAST sushi-ACC

Compared to other phenomena pertaining to word orders, such as scrambling (see (5)), postposing has received less attention in linguistics and related fields. Against this situation, then, the present chapter first sets out a solid empirical ground of the study on postposing by describing the grammatical properties

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