A Diachronic Constructional Analysis of the Word Order Restriction Japanese: A Mismatch in Grammatical Constituency

Chiharu Uda Kikuta
Doshisha University
cuda@mail.doshisha.ac.jp

Construction Grammar has it that language is a system of constructions, each of which is a pairing of form and meaning of any size and of any level of schematicity. This broad definition, however, underspecifies what exactly the "form" should be, which is a potential problem when a construction is larger than a simple phrase, and different kinds of formal information are involved. This paper explores the word order restriction exhibited by the nominal clause in Old Japanese (OJ) and demonstrates that the restriction reflects a curious mismatch of two different types of formal specification: the syntactic realization of arguments and a partial morphosyntactic template functioning as a filter. Proposing a multiple-inheritance analysis to accommodate this duality, I argue that the template, which loses effect in Early Middle Japanese (EMJ), is motivated by the language users' processing strategy.

While word order is relatively free in Japanese, detailed examinations of *Man'yoshu*, which is virtually the sole source of data of OJ, have independently discovered that a topic and a focus, as well as an accusative object must precede the subject case-marked with [no/ga] (Yanagida 2005). This restriction, interpreted as specifying the word order or the configurational structure of the clause, has inspired various analyses in generative grammar. Watanabe (2002), for instance, takes it as a sign of focus (or *wh-*) movement, (cf. also Yanagida 2005). However, the configurational approach grossly undermines the fact that the restriction constrains only the order of phrases with an explicit case/discourse marker. Thus, a zero-marked object, for instance, can occur after the subject NP. The sensitivity to surface morphological form presents a challenge to usual syntactic analyses, and has escaped proper treatment, but I claim that is at the heart of the issue, and present a multiple-inheritance solution in Construction Grammar, where the two kinds of formal specification are inherited separately.

Given that the subject marker [no/ga] is homonymous with the genitive case in OJ and EMJ, the morphosyntactic template is clearly reminiscent of a simple NP: no case/discourse-marked phrase is allowed between the genitive and the head. A similar kind of noun/verb synchretism, as well as the mixed properties in the diachronic shift of a nominal clause, is widely observed crosslinguistically (Heine 2009), but what is curious in the present instance is that the nominal template seems only activated by the presence of the case marker on the subject, which marks the left edge of the template; otherwise, the arguments are free to occur as in a usual clause. This raises a question about the nature of this restriction, and why (part of) a clause must conform to a particular morphological pattern.

To answer this question, I call attention to psycholinguistic experiments on Japanese, which have suggested that a case marker can give a clue to syntactic parsing (cf. Miyamoto 2002). One study, which examined the issue of nominative/genitive conversion, a related construction in Present-day Japanese, reports that the genitive case makes the participant expect a simple NP, triggering a garden path effect when it actually marks the subject argument (Yuhaku & Nakai 2010). Drawing on these results as indirect evidence, this paper hypothesizes that the word order restriction is motivated by language users' processing strategy: when the ambiguous genitive case [no/ga] is encountered, the nominal template is activated. This not only causes a temporary processing difficulty in OJ, but has resulted in a stronger avoidance of verbal case-marked phrases, until the nominal clause acquires more "verbality" in EMJ

References

Heine, Bernd. (2009). From nominal to clausal morphosyntax. In Talmy Givón & Masayoshi Shibatani (eds.) *Syntactic complexity: Diachrony, acquisition, neuro-cognition, evolution*, 23-51. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Miyamoto, Edison T. (2002). Case markers as clause boundary inducers in Japanese. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research* 31, 301-347.

Watanabe, Akira. (2002). Loss of overt *wh-*movement in Old Japanese. In David W. Lightfoot (ed.) *Syntactic effects of morphological change*, 179-195. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Yanagida, Yuko. (2005). *The syntax of focus and wh-questions in Japanese: A cross-linguistic perspective*. Tokyo: Hituzi Syobo.

Yuhaku, Atsushi, & Satoru Nakai. (2010). A Psycholinguistic Study of Nominative-Genitive Conversion Construction in Japanese, *Doshisha Literature* 52/53, 75-96.