

Mirative interpretations with verbal past-tense forms in Japanese

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1. Introduction Since DeLancey (1997), mirativity is assumed to be a grammatical category which expresses the speaker's unexpected mind and surprise to the new information, and its morphological realization, called a mirative marker, has been observed in various languages. Japanese is one of them and its adjectives can express mirativity attached with a kind of nominalizer (N-types), or taking a special form of conjugation (C-types). For example, the nominalizer *no* is attached with the adjective *tsumaranai* 'boring' in (1a), and the tense-bearing copula *-i*, usually incorporated into the adjectival stem in Japanese, is omitted from the adjective *umai* 'delicious' to take the special conjugated form in (1b):

- (1) a. *kono eiga, tsumaranai-no*
this movie boring
'This movie is boring!'
b. *kore, uma*
this delicious
'This is delicious!'

Cruschina (2011), within a cartographic framework, defines mirativity as related to information focus, but not contrastive focus. Also, the speaker's emotion of surprise stems from unexpectedness, but not counterexpectation.

This paper argues for the followings:

- (2) a. Verbal past-tense forms as well as adjectival forms can be mirative in Japanese.
b. (2a) provides the further evidence for the view that unexpectedness, but not counterexpectation, induces a mirative reading.

2. Interpretation of verbal past-tense forms in Japanese It has been observed in Teramura (1984), Abe (1993), Kinsui (1994), among others, that the inflectional suffix *-ta* of Japanese verbs exhibits dual function in prenominal modification, expressing either past tense or a resultant state. For example, the bracketed nominal modifier in (3), usually classified as a relative in Japanese linguistics, is ambiguous, as shown by the English translations:

- (3) [*boosi-o kabut-ta*] *hito*
hat-ACC wear-TA person
(a) 'the person who wore a hat'
(b) 'the person who is wearing a hat' (Abe 1993: 132)

(3a) shows a simple past reading, but (3b) shows a stative, non-eventive reading. Under (3b), the modified noun is described as being in the state of wearing a hat. The verbal past-tense form expressing stative meanings is called "adjectival *-ta*," and it has an adjectival function.

If the form of adjectival *-ta* is really adjectival, its limited distribution in embedded prenominal modifiers is mysterious. Rather, it is expected that it can have a mirative usage in matrix sentences in the parallel way that Japanese normal adjectives can. We show that the

verbal form with adjectival *-ta* can be a mirative expression in non-embedded environments. *Magat-ta* ‘bent’ in (4) is the typical example of adjectival *-ta* in a mirative usage:

- (4) *kono kugi magat-ta*
this nail bend-TA
‘This nail is bent!’

3. Non-occurrences of nominatives in Japanese miratives According to Konno (2015), nominative subjects cannot appear in mirative constructions of C-types. If *kore* ‘this’ is marked with the nominative case particle *-ga*, (1b) resists a mirative interpretation:

- (5) **kore-ga, uma*
this-NOM delicious
‘This is delicious!’

Miratives in N-type are also incompatible with the nominative subject. When the nominative marker is attached with *kono eiga* ‘this movie’ in (1a), the sentence lacks a mirative reading:

- (6) *kono eiga-ga, tsumaranai-no*
this movie-NOM boring
‘This movie is boring’

(6) just makes the assertion that this movie is boring. Or the predicate *tsumaranai* ‘boring’ is contrastively focused. (1a) and (6) are also different in intonation. One characteristic of mirative constructions in Japanese is thus to the incompatibility with the nominative subject.

4. Arguments for the mirative usage of adjectival *-ta* Moving back to (4), the subject *kono kugi* ‘this nail’ is not marked with the case particle, and in this sense, the requirement for mirative expressions is satisfied. In fact, if the nominative marker is attached with the subject in (4), a different nuance arises:

- (7) *kono kugi-ga magat-ta*
this nail-NOM bend-TA
‘This nail has been bent!’

(4) and (7) share the property of conveying the speaker’s immediate emotion to the event occurring in front of her. However, there is a subtle, but clear, difference in meaning between them. In (4), the resultant state of the nail’s bending is unexpected to the speaker. There was no idea in advance about whether the nail can be bent or not. In contrast, the resultant state denoted in (7) is against the expectation by the speaker. She did not believe that the nail was able to be bent. It is never the thing which she imagines is forced into a curve.

5. Summary Japanese verbal past-tense form has a mirative usage and that unexpectedness, but not conterexpectation connected to contrastiveness, is a key factor to a mirative interpretation, offering a further support for such a cartographic analysis as Cruschina (2011).

Selected References: Abe, Y. 1993. “Dethematized subjects and property ascription in Japanese,” *Language, Information and Computation*, 132-144, Seoul./ Cruschina, S. 2011. *Discourse-related features and functional projections*. Oxford: OUP./ Konno, H. 2015. The grammatical significance of private expression and its implications for the three-tier model of language use, *English Linguistics* 32:1, 139-155.