

SPEAKER'S PERSPECTIVE AND TENSE FORM VARIATION IN JAPANESE SPOKEN DISCOURSE

Shoichi Iwasaki

Clause formation is influenced by various factors such as the semantics of the situation to be coded, the morpho-syntax of a particular language, discourse structure and socio-linguistic considerations, among other. In this paper, I consider one other such factor which influences the formation of clauses. This clause formation is identified as "speaker's perspective," which is a part of a larger concept of subjectivity in language. I have identified three types of subjectivity in language elsewhere (Iwasaki in preparation): (a) expressions of speaker's attitude toward the real world which he codes; (b) "point-of-view"

or "empathy" (see also Kuno 1987) which demands that a speaker take one particular position from which to describe a situation; and (c) speaker's perspective. In this paper, I am only concerned with the last type of subjectivity in language.

Perspective is defined as a concept which measures the degree of accessibility that a speaker has for information conveyed in a clause. The speaker has a higher accessibility for information when it is definite/realis than indefinite/irrealis; when it is obtained directly rather than indirectly; when it involves the speaker rather than when it doesn't. I will demonstrate the importance of this

concept in the analysis of tense form variation in spoken Japanese discourse data.¹

Examination of the data reveals that both past and non-past tense forms appear to indicate past events. This means that tense forms are not used exclusively as temporal markers. Furthermore, the distribution of the two forms is rather systematic: Past tense forms usually appear with first person subjects and non-past tense forms usually appear with third person subjects. Tense form variation or the use of the non-temporal tense form is possible only in clauses which describe situations in the narrative proper after a temporal frame is set for the narrative by a temporal frame setter ("When I was a student"). The following discussion, thus, only considers tense

forms in clauses of narration following such frame setters.

1. *The pattern of tense form variation.*

Below is one example which shows the typical pattern of tense form variation. The speaker of this narrative explains how she got on a plane with a ticket she had bought using her friend's ID card. I use small bold face for non-past tense forms and LARGE BOLD FACE for past tense form both in the Japanese original and free English translation. In the Japanese transcript only clauses with tensed predicates are indicated and tenseless non-finite clauses are omitted since they are irrelevant for the present discussion. In the English translation, however, the omitted clauses are inserted for clarity.

- (1) (False ID)
- 217 chekkuin no .. kauntaa no hito ga ne, a kawatta namae da ne nante **yu** wake.
 230 mo rosheriinii.nan-te **YUTTA**-n da kedomo.
 233 kono hen kikitsutteru kara zenzen **dekinai** wake.
 245 nani-jin nan te **kiku** wake.
 247 de ne moshi tai-jin wa motto iro ga kuroi-n ja nai ka kik-aretara komaru naa to **OMOTTA** no.
 260 de maa maa kik-are-nakute
 261 yatto **NOTTA** no.
 217 *The check-in counter clerk said* its's an interesting name.
 (223 I said yes.)
 (224 He asked how it was pronounced.)
 230 *I SAID* "Rosheriinii."
 233 *I couldn't pronounce* it because my cheek was tense.
 (236 I had to say it three times.)
 (238 He said, "What? Say it again?)
 245 *He asked* what nationality I was.
 247 *I THOUGHT* what I should do if he'd said if Thais have much darker complexion.
 260 but I wasn't asked
 261 *I finally GOT ON* the plane.

See the next diagram for clear visualization of the relationship between subject and tense form. Subject is always indirectly indicated through

ellipsis except for line 217, which has a specific subject NP. 1S means first person subject and 3S third person subject.

<i>Line</i>	<i>Subject</i>	<i>Tense Form</i>
217	<i>the check-in counter clerk</i> (3S)	<i>Non-past</i>
230	<i>ellipsis</i> (1S)	<i>Past</i>
233	<i>ellipsis</i> (1S)	<i>Non-past</i>
245	<i>ellipsis</i> (3S)	<i>Non-past</i>
247	<i>ellipsis</i> (1S)	<i>Past</i>
261	<i>ellipsis</i> (1S)	<i>Past</i>

Notice the two cases with 3S appear with non-past tense form and three out of four cases with 1S appear with past tense form. (The reason why clause 233 appears with non-past form despite the existence of a first person subject will be explained later.)

The pattern of co-occurrence of subject

type and tense form type is not restricted to this one particular excerpt but is observed throughout the narrative data examined. Observe Table 1, which contrasts first person subjects and third person subjects. Information for non-human subjects is also given to show the similarity of this pattern to that of third person subjects.

(TABLE 1) Tense form distribution for different subject in 16 first person spoken narratives

	<i>Past Tense Form</i>	<i>Non-Past Tense Form</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>1S</i>	169 (78.6%)	46 (21.1%)	215 (100%)
<i>3S</i>	49 (36.0%)	87 (64.0%)	136 (100%)
<i>Non-H</i>	68 (34.7%)	128 (65.3%)	196 (100%)
<i>Total</i>	286	261	547

When the subject is first person, past tense form is used 78.6% of the time and non-past tense form is used 21.1% of the time. The preference of tense form reverses when the subject is 3S, i.e., past tense form is used 36.0% of the time and non-past tense form 64.0% of the time.

2. *Asymmetry of internal state predicates*

The contrast between first person subject and third person subject is not easily explained since Japanese does not usually exhibit an asymmetry between these two types of subject through, for example, subject-verb coreferencing.

However, there is one area in which the distinction of subject causes a significant effect on the form of the predicate. This is the area concerning a person's "internal state." (Kuroda 1973) Internal states cover the area which is accessible only to the person who experiences them and refers specifically to a person's emotion, sensation and cognition.

The following set of sentences makes this point clear. The speaker expresses his or her emotion through the use of an adjective. (2) for example shows the speaker's sadness through the adjective *kanashii* 'sad.'

- (2) boku wa kanashii.
I TOP sad 'I am sad.'

However, the same adjective cannot be used to express a third person's feeling. Thus (3) is ungrammatical.

- (3) *jon wa kanashii. 'John is sad.'

The predicate must be modified so that the situation is coded indirectly, as in (4) and (5).

- (4) jon wa kanashi-gatteriru. show sign of
'John shows sign of being sad.'

- (5) jon wa kanashii yoo da/ kanashi-soo da.
'John seems/looks like sad.'

Below is another example where the distinction between first and third person subjects influences the predicate form. A verb of cognition *omou* 'think' is used differently according to the subject

identity. Sentence (6) with first person subject is stated with an unmodified form with a polite suffix and a non-past suffix.

- (6) boku wa soo omoimasu.
I TOP so think:PLT:NOP 'I think so.'

However, this form will result an ungrammatical sentence with 3S as shown in (7).

- (7) *kare wa soo omoimasu.
he 'He thinks so.'

A stative (or lower transitivity) form of predicate must be used with third person subject, as in (8).

- (8) kare wa soo omotte-imasu. 'He thinks so.'
think-STA:POL:NOP

These examples show a clear split between first person subject sentences and third person subject sentences for internal state predicates. The motivation for this split is the degree of accessibility to the situation to be coded by the person who reports it.

If the speaker reports his own internal state, he has direct access to it, but if he reports someone else's internal state, he can access it only indirectly. A speaker's perspective has been defined as a concept which measures the degree of information accessibility. This may be refined as follows.

When the speaker codes a situation in which he is a participant, he plays the dual role of a reporter of the situation and a participant in the narrative which is being coded. In this case it is assumed that the speaker has assimilated the situation to a higher degree. I call this situation "(speaker's) primary perspective." If, on the other hand, he was not involved in the situation he is describing, the degree of assimilation is lower. I call this situation "(speaker's) secondary perspective."

For tense form variation, it is hypothesized that direct and indirect access to information

dictate the selection of tense forms in narrative. It is hypothesized as follows:

Past tense forms indicate a speaker's direct access to the information which is being communicated (i.e., primary perspective) and non-past tense forms indirect access (or secondary perspective).

In the following two sections, this hypothesis is considered.

3. *Tense form and information accessibility*

It has been argued that a discrepancy appears in predicates which code internal states between first and third person subjects and the same discrepancy appears in tense forms of predicates between first and third person subjects in narrative. It was hypothesized that past tense forms indicate a higher degree of information accessibility

and non-past tense form a lower degree. Why does such a pattern exist?

The tie between first person subject and past (non-temporal) tense form and that between third person subject and non-past (non-temporal) tense forms is hardly accidental. Past tense forms are suited for a situation where a speaker has a higher degree of information accessibility and non-past tense forms for a lower degree of accessibility. This is a reasonable pattern because past tense forms as "temporal markers" express a situation which is definite/realis, while non-past tense forms as "temporal markers" express a situation which is indefinite/irrealis.

Thus the speaker has a higher degree of accessibility to the information expressed in (9) than that in (10), because in (9) the speaker is reporting a situation which actually happened but in (10) he is referring to a situation which has not yet come about.

(9)	boku	wa	jon	o	nagutta.	
	I	TOP	John	ACC	hit:PST	'I hit John.'
(10)	boku	wa	jon	o	naguru.	
	I	TOP	John	ACC	hit:NOP	'I will hit John.'

Thus the degree of information accessibility is greater for a sentence expressed with a past tense form. This distinction of degree of accessibility to information carries over to the non-temporal use of the tense form. Thus the past tense form is suitable to express primary perspective situations and the non-past tense form is suitable for secondary perspective situations.

4. *Evidence for influence of information accessibility on tense form variation*

Table 1 shows the canonical pattern of tense forms according to subject. This table also shows some apparent exceptions to the canonical pattern. However, on closer examination, these apparent

exceptional cases are not exceptional, and they actually support the claim that speaker's perspective influences the tense form.

Contrary to the canonical pattern, the non-past tense form sometimes is used when the subject is the first person. According to the claim developed here, it is predicted that in these cases, the speaker does not have a higher degree of accessibility to the information conveyed. One such example is a negative predicate. A speaker cannot assume a high degree of accessibility to a situation which does not exist even if the subject is first person. This is similar to the case of the future predicate exemplified in (10). Recall at this point, in (1), the only non-past tense form used with

the first person subject is a negative predicate.

It is also predicated that if the transitivity of a predicate is lower, then the use of non-past tense forms will increase because, as already

discussed in examples (6) through (8), a stative (lower transitive) predicate is a sign of indirect access to the information. Table 2 confirms these predictions.

(TABLE 2) Ratio of predicate types in past and non-past tense clauses with 1S

Predicate Type	Non-Past	Past
Non-Static	4 (8.8%)	111 (65.6%)
Stative	21 (45.6%)	52 (30.7%)
Negative	21 (45.6%)	6 (3.7%)
Total	46 (100%)	169 (100%)

In a clause with the first person subject, the past tense form is used 65.6% of the time when the predicate is non-stative, but this form is used only 30.7% of the time when the predicate is stative and 3.7% when the predicate is negative. The situation reverses in the case of non-past tense forms. The non-past tense form is used only 8.8% of the time when the predicate is non-stative, but is used 45.6% of the time when the predicate is stative or when it is negative.

Thus, cases where the non-past tense form is used contrary to the canonical pattern further supports the hypothesis of speaker's perspective influence on the tense form.

There are also cases where the past tense form is used unexpectedly for third person sub-

jects or non-human subjects. These cases also support the speaker's perspective hypothesis. That is, even if the subject is not a first person, the primary perspective could infiltrate a clause under certain conditions. For example, if the subject is third person but is a member of a group to which a speaker belongs (such as a speaker's brother) as opposed to another third person, or if the speaker is a goal or recipient in a situation being coded ("He came to me").

Below I show two other sources through which speaker's primary perspective slips into a clause. The first one is speaker's discovery of action. In (11), the speaker codes a situation where she was almost drowned. Notice the past tense in line 48 despite the third person subject.

(11)

- 45 hontoni moo oboreru ka to omotte ne
 47 awatete ne
 48 yoko ni ne konnani ookina ne futotta obasan ga ITA no.
 45 I thought I was going to be drowned-TE
 47 I panicked-TE
 48 there WAS this big, fat lady at the side.

(Drowning)

Although the subject of 48 is third person, this is a situation where the speaker has discovered something. Thus the speaker is both reporter and participant of the situation and this qualifies this statement as primary perspective.

Another usual case where the past tense

form appears with non-first person subject is a clause which codes a situation where the speaker is an experiencer. This situation is often obtained when a clause has an inanimate subject and the predicate is adjectival. In (12) the speaker codes the quality of the wine which someone offered to her.

(12)

(East Europe)

366 wain o ... dashite-kureta no.

372 monosugoku oishikatta no ne;

366 (The wife) offered us some wine.

372 *It (the wine) WAS DELICIOUS*

It is possible to use the non-past tense form in line 372. But doing so would lose the effect of expressing the speaker's experience. There are a number of cases which are similar to (12) where a past tense form is used despite the non-first person subject due to the speaker's hidden role as an experiencer.

To summarize, apparent exceptions to the canonical use of tense forms in narrative are not counterexamples to the hypothesis but rather support for the hypothesis. Perspective usually corresponds to the subject of a clause, but not necessarily so because perspective is defined by the speaker's accessibility to information.

5. *Applicability of speaker's perspective in language*

The above discussion confirms that the degree of accessibility to information influences

clause form (more specifically, the morphology of the predicate). The distinction between first person (linguistic realization of the speaker) and third person subject seems a natural contrast in terms of such information accessibility. If this is the case, we can expect to see a contrast between these two types of subject at other places in the language.

In fact, such contrasts can be found both in Japanese and in other languages. First, in Japanese intentional expressions, the discrepancy is found. For example, the suffix *mai* is interpretable as showing intention only with first person subjects. If it is used with a third person subject, it is interpreted as the speaker's supposition. See (13) and (14).

(13) (boku wa) moo kesshite iku-mai.

I TOP again never go-SFX I will never go.

(14) kare wa moo kesshite iku-mai.

he TOP again never go-SFX

I don't think he will go.

In other languages also there are a number of linguistic phenomena which seem to be influenced by such a demarcation between first and third person subjects. DeLancy (1987:63) notes that in some Tibetan dialects and Newari, "morphosyntactic indication of volitionality is restricted to clauses with first person participants." He gives the reason for this fact as follows: "one can have direct knowledge of the volitionality or non-volitionality only of one's own acts; volitionality is a mental state not observable by others." (p.64) This exactly parallels the argument given in the previous sections.

Comrie (1981:188) notes the distinction between first/second person subject and third person subject: different case marking between the two types of the subject (e.g., the split between ergative marking and nominative marking in Dyrbal) and obligatory application of passivization with first/second person patient (in Southern Tiwa).

6. Conclusion

I have argued in this paper that the concept of speaker's perspective must be taken into account in order to understand some aspects of clause formation.

In Japanese, speaker's perspective is found to influence verb morphology, or to be more precise, tense form selection. In spoken narratives, a clause with first person subject is marked with the past tense form and that with third person subject with non-past tense form. This distribution

cannot be adequately accounted for unless the speaker's perspective (degrees of information accessibility) is considered. Past tense as a temporal marker codes a situation which is definite/realis and non-past tense form describes a situation which is indefinite/irrealis. This is related to the different forms for predicate which code internal states with first and third person subjects. This might be further related to the fact that Japanese has developed an evidential system, which imposes to mark different sources of information coded in the clause.

Though the phenomenon was looked at only in Japanese, it will be interesting to find out if this bears any typological significance. In particular, it is worthwhile to study the relationship between the status of evidential systems in a language and how a speaker's perspective influences its grammar. That is, we can test the following hypothesis: if a language has a rich evidential system, as Japanese does, the morphological distinction is made between the speaker and others (e.g., tense forms) because the evidential system usually concerns how the speaker has obtained information.

To test this hypothesis, we must first identify all morphological forms of a language and find pairs of contrasting forms (e.g., past and non-past forms) and see how these forms distribute for first and third person subjects. This should be studied in discourse since such contrasting pairs might have basic functions (e.g., as tense markers) and at the sentence level the subtle influence of speaker's perspective might not be isolated.

NOTE

(1) The data base consists of 16 first person narratives which contain more than 1,200 clauses.

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Shoichi Iwasaki:

B.A. 1974 Waseda University (English Literature)
B.A. 1977 International Christian University, (Languages)
M.A. 1979 University of Hawaii at Manua, (East Asian Languages)
Ph.D. 1988 (expected) University of California at Los Angeles (Linguistics)
Currently teaching at Japanese Program. Thammasat University

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