

Interpretation of “-Teiru”(-ing) Construction in Unergative and Unaccusative Verbs of Japanese—An Approach of Speech Act—

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Abstract— “-Teiru”(-ing) Construction can express an action in progress or a resulting state. Hirakawa (2003) states that “-Teiru” with an unergative (a volitional verb) obtains progressive reading and an unaccusative (a non-volitional verb) obtains a resultative reading. However, *dekakeru* ‘go out’ in *Haha wa dekakete imasu* ‘Mother is out.’ is unergative but expresses a resulting state, and *fuku* ‘blow’ in *Kaze ga fuite iru* ‘The wind is blowing.’ is unaccusative but is a progressive action. This study proposes a framework with the approach of speech act for the interpretation of “-Teiru Construction in unergatives and unaccusatives in Japanese. The findings are : ①Momentary verbs include unergatives and unaccusatives express resulting state as in (4) and (2) but in certain contexts they express other meanings. ②Unaccusatives showing movement as in (4) express actions in progress. ③A context is an essential factor for the interpretation of “-Teiru” Construction: Syntactic Context such as *don don* in (3) and Discourse Context such an observation of a situation in (20b) (an unaccusative, progressive). In conclusion, in the interpretation of the meanings of an action in progress and a resultative state of Japanese verbs the framework should include: i) The investigation of meanings both in Unergatives and Unaccusatives Verbs. ii) Classification of verbs in each category in i), iii) Contexts are essential for the interpretation and iv) The two meanings of “-Teiru” Construction are interpreted at the time of speaking.

Keywords— Japanese “-Teiru (ing)”Construction, Unergatives, Unaccusatives, Contexts, speech act

I. INTRODUCTION

Many researchers explain two meanings of the “-Teiru” (-ing) Construction in Japanese verbs as “an action in progress” (Doosa Keizoku) when used with an action verb such as *yomu* (read) or *hashiru* (run) as shown in (1a, b) and the “resultative state” (Kekka Keizoku) when “-Teiru” is attached to a momentary verb as in (2a, b).

- (1) a. *Boku wa ima hon o yonde iru*. I am reading a book now. (an action in progress)
b. *Taroo wa ima hashitte iru*. Taro is running. (an action in progress)
- (2) a. *Yuki ga tsumotte iru*. The snow is piled up. (a resultative state)
b. *Rajio ga kowarete iru*. The radio is broken. (a stative result)

The verb *yomu* (read) in (1a) is a transitive verb while the verb *hashiru* (run) in (1b) is an intransitive verb. Both *yomu* (read) and *hashiru* (run) belong to Durative Verb (Keizoku Dooshi) which gives the meaning that an action started in the past that it is continuing at the time of speaking and may continue in the future. In (2a, b), however, the *tsumoru* (pile up) and *kowareru* (be broken) are momentary verbs. These verbs express an action occurred in the past and a result continuing at the time of speaking. However, a momentary verb as shown in (3) may express an action in progress (the example given by Kindaichi (1950))

(3) *Don don yuki ga tsumotte iru*. The snow is piling up “action in progress”

In (3), the adverb *don don* (constantly) implies the situation of the speaker watching at the snow falling continuously from the sky on to the ground at the time of speaking. Thus, although *tsumoru* is a momentary verb, it obtains a progressive reading.

Look at the following sentence:

- (4) a. *Taroo ga kite iru*. Taro is coming towards us. (an action in progress)
b. *Taroo wa ima kokoni kite iru*. Taro has come and is here now. (a resultative state)

In (4a), the speaker utters the sentence while looking at Taro who is approaching toward him/her; this indicates an action of progress. Without a specific situation like in (4a), a momentary such as *kuru* (come) in (4b) obtains a resultative state that Taro came before and is still there at the time of speaking. Both *hashiru* (run) in (1b) and *kuru* (come) in (4a) are volitional intransitive verbs while *tsumoru* (pile up) and *kowareru* (be broken) in (2a, b) are non-volitional intransitive verbs. The former is known as Unergatives and the latter is called Unaccusatives.

It should be noted that the verb *hashiru* does not obtain a reading of resultative state while *kuru* does though both are volitional intransitive verbs. Another point that should be mentioned is that a non-volitional verb such as *tsumoru* can express an action in progress as shown in (3) but this would never occur with *kowareru* (be broken) Kindaichi gives a brief explanation that although *tsumoru* is a momentary verb, it is originally a durative verb, therefore *don don* (constantly) can co-occur with *tsumoru*. These phenomena indicate that though verbs in Japanese have been classified from various points of view by many linguists and researchers, investigations are

necessary in order to find some typical characteristics of verbs in categories such as transitive verbs, intransitive verbs and momentary verbs. It should be noted that the term a 'momentary verb' in this study is equivalent to Vendler's achievement verb (Vendler 1967, see Nakagawa S. 2011) which refers to an action that occurs in a short period of time. To my knowledge, there have not been any comprehensive frameworks that can explain how to interpret the meanings of "-Teiru" construction in various situations expressed by transitive verbs, intransitive verbs and so forth. The present study offers a comprehensive framework with an approach of Speech Act (An approach where the situations at the time of speaking are considered during the interpretation of meanings.) to explain how to interpret the meanings of "an action in progress" and "a resultative state" of "-Teiru" construction in unergatives and unaccusatives of Japanese verbs. (See the semantic characteristics of "-Teiru" Construction in Nakagawa S. 2011)

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Kindaichi (Kindaichi H, 1950)

Kindaichi divides Japanese verbs into 4 categories; namely:

- 1) Stative Verbs: aru (to exist), dekiru (be able)
- 2) Durative Verbs (Keizoku Doushi): yomu (read), kaku, warau (laugh), naku, etc.
- 3) Momentary Verbs (Shunkan Doushi): shinu (die), tsuku (the light is on), tsumoru (pile up).
- 4) Verbs with "-Teiru": This type of verb is usually attached with "-Teiru": sobieru (rise into the sky), sugureru (excellent)

It can be seen that in Kindaichi's classification, most verbs in Japanese fall into the 2) and the 3) categories.

Look at the sentences shown in (5a), (5b) and (6a):

- (5) a. Taro wa hon o yonde iru. Taro is reading a book.
b. Yamadasan wa hashitte iru. Mr. Yamada is running.
- (6) a. Dento ga tsuite iru. The light is on.

Kindaichi explains that *yomu* in (5a) is a Durative Verb, when in the "-teiru" construction, it expresses the meaning that an action started in the past and the rest of the action is in the progressive state at the time of speaking and will continue afterwards. It should be noticed that the verb "*hashiru* (run)" in (5b) is also a durative verb except it is intransitive while "*yomu* (read)" in (5a) is transitive.

In (6a), the verb *tsuku* (the light is on) is an intransitive verb. According to Kindaichi's classification, *tsuku* is in the category of momentary verb. Kindaichi explains that the progressive form of this type of verb gives the idea that an action started before the time of speaking and only the result is left at the time of speaking. Thus, it gives the resultative reading. Now look at sentence (7):

- (7) a. Anata wa Yamada-san o shitte imasu ka. Do you know Mr. Yamada?
b. Boku wa Yamada-san o mae kara shitte imasu. I have known Mr. Yamada until now. According to the verb classification of Kindaichi (1950), *shiru* (know) is a momentary verb because the action of getting to know

took place in the past and it is now in the resulting state. It should be noticed that even the adverb *mae kara* (since the past up till now) is used in (7b), (7b) is not an action in progress but a resultative state like (7a). This indicates that not all momentary verbs can express an action in progress like *tsumoru* (pile up) in (3). However, Kindaichi (1950) does not give any further explanation of momentary verbs.

2.2 Hirakawa (2003)

Hirakawa (2003) explains that "-Teiru" construction can refer to action in progress and a resultative state. Hirakawa explains that the "-Teiru" in (8) is attached to an unergative verb therefore it obtains a progressive reading, whereas in (9) is formed with an unaccusative verb that obtains a resultative state reading⁴. (For convenience, the Roman alphabets used by Hirakawa in (8) and (9) are altered to the system used in this study.)

(8) Kodomo ga waratte-iru. The child is laughing.

(9) Hikooki ga kuukoo ni tsuite iru. The plane arrived (and it is) at the airport.

Hirakawa (2003: 69) points out that since unergative verbs belong to the activity class and do not denote a change of state, they allow only a progressive reading. On the other hand, unaccusative verbs are typically achievements, thus involving a change of state and only resultative reading is allowed. In fact, there are unergative verbs which express resultative meanings and unaccusative that express progressive meanings as shown in (10) and (11) respectively:

(10) Haha wa ima dekakete imasu. dekaeru (go out) is unergative verb

(11) Kaze ga fuite iru. fuku (blow) is unaccusative verb

It is obvious that (10) is an unergative sentence. However, as Takami & Kuno (Takami & Kuno, 2006) points out that, in this sentence, the activity has finished therefore the sentence expresses the resulting state. On the other hand, although (11) is an unaccusative verb, it denotes the movement of the wind, so this sentence expresses progressive meaning.

2.3 Kudo M (Kudo M, 1991, 1995)

Kudo divides verbs into three categories:

1. Subject-action verbs which give a result of changes in the objects (transitive verb) such as akeru (open), tsukuru (make, produce)

According to Kudo, the "Teiru" Construction in this group expresses an action in progress in an active voice and a resultative state in a passive voice. However, Kuno (Kuno S., 2006) points out that Kudo's explanation is insufficient as shown in (12a, b)

- (12) a. Taroo ga ude o makutte iru. Taro is rolling up the sleeves (an action in progress)/ Taro is wearing a shirt with the sleeves rolled up. (a resultative state)
b. Sono ko wa kaban ni kiihorudaa o tsukete iru. That child is fastening the key ring onto the bag/ That child has a bag with the key ring fastened on.

The present study agrees with Kuno's explanation. However, the verbs *makuru* "fold, Roll" and *tsukeru* "fasten" shown in

(12 a, b) are all stative verbs which describe the states of the subjects. Thus, Kuno's explanation is true only when there is a situation that the speaker is watching Taro's action at the time of speaking.

2. Verbs expressing changes of subjects which are intransitive verbs Kudo explains that "-Teiru" Construction in this group express resultative state. They are:

- a. Verbs expressing changes by a person's intention such as *kuru* "come", *iku* "go" *deru* "go out"
- b. Verbs expressing changes without a person's intention such as *shinu* "die", *tsumoru* "pile up", *futoru* "gain weight", *kieru* "disappear".

However, as shown in (4) Taro ga kite iru. can be used to express when the speaker is looking at Taro who is coming towards him/her. For the verb *tsumoru*, it can express an action in progress when the speaker is looking at snow piling up at the time of speaking as shown in (2a) and (3).

3. Verbs express the actions of the subjects.

According to Kudo, this group expresses an action in progress:

- a. Transitive verbs: *taberu* (eat), *yomu* (read)
- b. Intransitive verbs (Volitional): *asobu* (play), *hashiru* (run), *hataraku* (work)
- c. Intransitive verbs (Non-volitional): *warau* (laugh), *furu* (rain fall), *moeru* (burn), *naku* (cry)

It is noticeable that not all verbs in 3c are non-volitional such as *warau* (laugh) and *naku* (cry). Thus, it can be said that there is still room for improvement to Kudo's framework.

2.4 Kuno (Kuno S., 2006)

Kuno explains the interpretations of "an action of progress" and "a resultative state" of "-Te iru" Construction in Japanese verbs and cites that in the interpretations, three factors should be considered: 1) The meanings of words, 2) the contextual factor such as an adverb and 3) The interpretation depends on whether the speaker can notice the occurrence at the time of speaking.

For 1) the meanings of words, Kuno argues against Kindaichi's explanation that a momentary verb expresses a resultative state by giving example (13a, b):

- (13) a. *Ano hito wa futotte iru./yasete iru.* That person is heavy/skinny. (resultative state)
- b. *Ojiisan wa atama ga hagate iru.* Grandfather is bald. (resultative state)

Kuno argues that the verbs *futoru* "getting fat / getting skinny" and *hageru* "getting bald" in (13a) and (13b) need time to develop the actions. Kuno claims that these verbs are not momentary verbs but they express resultative state. Kuno is right that these verbs are not momentary verbs. However, the verbs in (13a, b) are neither action verbs, rather, they are stative verbs which describe a state of the subject and not describe an action. For factors 2) and 3), Kuno gives examples as shown in 14(a, b)

- (14) a. *Yuki ga sukoshizutsu tokete iru.* The snow is melting little by little. (resultative State)

- b. *Isu ga taikukan ni naraberarete iru.* The chairs have been put in a role (resultative state) /are being put in a role. (an action in progress)

In (14a), *sukoshizutsu* "little by little" is an adverb in a sentence describing the continuity of an action of melting. In (14b), however, the meaning of an action in progress of people putting the chairs in a role can be interpreted only when the speaker is looking at the activity of movement at the time of speaking. In fact, both (14a) and (14b) belong to the same factor of context; in the present study, the former is called Syntactic Context and the latter is called Discourse Context⁷. (See Nakagawa, 2011) Therefore the factors of 2) and 3) should be categorized in the same group of Context. Kuno has contributed a great deal to the explanation of interpretations of the "-Te iru" Construction. However, it cannot be said that Kuno's frame work is comprehensive.

III. ANALYSIS

3.1 The semantic Characteristics of "-Teiru" Construction

In Nakagawa (Nakagawa, 2011), the semantic characteristics of Japanese verbs in "-Teiru" Construction are divided into six types:

A type (Action in Progress): *Boku wa ima hon o yon de imasu.* I am reading a book now.

B type (Resulting State): *Yuki ga tsumotte imasu.* The snow is piled up.

C type (Habits): *Ano ko wa terebi bakari mite imasu ne.* That girl is always watching television, isn't she?

D type: (Past experience) *Amadius to iu eiga wa sankai mite imasu yo.* You know, I have seen Amadeus three times.

E type: (Future activity) *Watashi wa hon o yomoo to shite iru.* I am going to read a book.

F type (Present state): *Kono michi ga magatte iru.* This road curves.

Among the six types of meanings, A type, B type and F type are the types expressing activities or situations occur at the time of speaking. However, F type is expressed with a stative verb which describes a state of the subject.

As discussed in in the previous chapters, there is an ambiguity in the meaning of the "-Teiru" Construction whether it is an action in progress or a resulting state; that is whether it expresses the meaning of A Type or B Type. One reason is due to the polysemy in Japanese verbs. Another reason is that, though as an aspectual marker, "-Teiru" can express either an action in progress or a resulting state depending on what category of verbs to which it is attached—an unergative verb or an unaccusative verb, for example. However, The ambiguity can be eliminated with the co-occurrence of adverbs, or with the observation of the situation of the speaker at the time of speaking. It is obvious that the factors for the interpretations of the two meanings in Japanese verbs; namely, "an action in progress" and "a resulting state", are:

- 1) The meanings and the classification of verbs.
- 2) Contexts
- 3) An activity or a situation at the time of speaking.

The present study proposes the following framework for the interpretation of the “-Teiru” Construction

1 Categories of verbs: Unergative verbs and Unaccusative Verbs

Kindaichi's has contributed to the classification of verbs based on aspectual meaning of verbs. The verbs in A Type are duration verbs and the verbs in B Type are momentary verbs. However, there are problems such as momentary verbs in the case of examples (3) and (4) which need more explanation about the subcategories of the momentary verbs themselves.

Since Japanese verbs can be divided into transitive verbs and intransitive verbs, the present study divides verbs into two categories:

--**Unergative verbs:** This category typically refers to intransitive verbs which are volitional. (In the interpretation, transitive verbs of action verbs are included in this category.) This category is divided into two subcategories:

A. Duration verbs: Transitive verbs and Intransitive verbs

B. Momentary verbs: an action / accomplishment verb

--**Unaccusative verbs:** This category refers to intransitive verbs which are non-volitional. This category is divided into two subcategories:

A. Passive verbs

B. Verbs of movement

2. Contexts: In the present study, contexts are divided into two categories:

A. Syntactic Context: such as an adverb in a sentence in the sentence level.

B. Discourse Context: An adverb or a previous context shown before the sentence.

In this level, a context may be a real situation observed by the speaker at the time of speaking.

3. The time of speaking

Analysis

1. Categories of verbs: Unergative verbs and Unaccusative Verbs

--**Unergative verbs:**

A. Duration verbs: Transitive verbs and Intransitive verbs: It should be noted that the subjects of intransitive verbs which are unergative are active subjects, therefore they behave like the subjects of transitive verbs.

(15) a. Boku wa hon o yonde imasu. I am reading a book now. Transitive verb, unergative

b. Kodomotachi wa asonde iru deshou. The children may be playing. Intransitive verb, unergative.

In (15a, b), the verb *yomu* “read” and *asobu* “play” are verbs which need a certain length of time and the action which began in the past is continuing until the time of speaking. These verbs are therefore durative verbs and denote actions in progress when attached to “-Teiru”.

B. Momentary verbs: verbs of actions / accomplishment verbs

i. A momentary verb of an action being taken place at the time of speaking expresses an action in progress:

(16) Hanako ga kochira e kite iru. Hanako is coming towards here. “an action in progress”

In (16) the speaker is uttering the sentence while seeing or hearing that Hanako is approaching towards him/her.

ii. A momentary verb which is an accomplishment verb expresses a resulting state as shown in (17a, b).

(17) a. Hanako kokoni kite iru. Hanako has come and is here now.

b. Haha wa ima dekakete iru. Mother has gone out and is not home now.

--**Unaccusative verbs:** The “-Teiru” can denote “an action in progress” or “a resultative state” depending on the category of unaccusative verbs to which it is attached:

A. Passive verbs: In the present study the term “passive verb” refers to passive verbs such as *nagurareru* “be hit”, *otosareru* “be dropped” and verbs such as *kowareru* “broken”, *oreru* “folded, broken down” whose subjects behave like the objects of transitive verbs. When “-Teiru” is attached to this type of verbs, it denotes a resultative state as shown in (18 a, b)

(18) a. Paatii no ryori ga nokosarete iru. The food at the party is left. (a resultative state)

b. Tokei ga kowarete iru. The clock is broken. (a resultative state)

B. Verbs of movement: This type of verbs do not denote a change of state such as *fuku* “blow”, *nagareru* “flow”. Therefore when “-Teiru” is attached to this type of verbs, the construction expresses an action in progress as shown in (19 a, b)

(19) a. Kaze ga fuite iru. The wind is blowing. (an action in progress)

b. Konbeyaa rain ni seihin ga nagarete iru. The products are moving along the conveyer. (an action in progress)

C. Momentary verbs: Unlike unergative verbs, momentary verbs in unaccusatives can express only a resultative state by itself except when there is an particular context that alters the meaning as illustrated in (20).

(20) a. Happa ga ochite iru. The leaves have fallen.

b. Happa ga hirahira to ochite iru. The leaves are fluttering to the ground.

Sentence (20a) obtains a reading of resultative state because word *ochiru* “fall” is an unaccusative. However, the sentence can obtain an action in progress reading when there is an adverb; in this sentence, the word *hirahira* “flutter” or the speaker is explaining the situation while watching at the falling leaves as shown in (20 b).

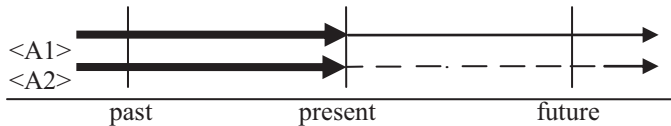
2. Contexts: A syntactic context or a discourse context plays a very important role in giving the situational information for the interpretation. Contexts can be found in Unergatives and Unaccusatives and they alter the meanings of a sentence. Sentences in (2a, b) are some examples.

3. The time of speaking: The meaning of “an action in progress” and “the resultative state” can be interpreted only an action or a result is continuing until the time of speaking. (21a, b) illustrated the difference of the meanings:

(21) a. Boku wa ima hon o yonde iru. I am reading a book now. (an action in progress)

b. Boku wa yoku hon o yonde iru. I often read books. (habitual action)

The meanings of “-Teiru” Construction in Unergatives and Unaccusatives can be shown by the following diagram. <A1> refers to a continuous action that may continue until the future by the control of the subject such as a durative verb like *yomu* “read” or a continuity of a resultative state which can be controlled by the subject such as *kuru* “come” in (3). <A2> refers to an action or a state of unaccusative verbs that may continue until the future but it cannot be controlled since unaccusatives are non-volitional.



(fig. 1) Continuity of an action in progress and a resultative state

IV. CONCLUSION

From the discussion and the analysis in the previous chapters, it can be concluded that The “-Teiru” Construction can express the meaning of an action in progress typically in unergatives and a resultative state typically in unaccusatives. However, because of the existence of polysemy in Japanese verbs, there are sentences showing ambiguity whether it is the meaning of an action in progress or a resultative state. This

ambiguity can be eliminated when a syntactic context such as an adverb is used in the sentence or a discourse context provides more information about the situation at the time of speaking. This indicates that in interpreting the meanings of an action in progress and a resultative state of Japanese verbs the framework for the interpretation should include: i) The investigation of meaning in the categories of Unergative Verbs and Unaccusative Verbs. ii) The classification of verbs in each category in i), iii) Contexts are essential for the interpretation and iv) The two meanings of “-Teiru” Construction are interpreted at the time of speaking.

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