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# Toward a New Taxonomy of Japanese Passives

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## 1 Introduction

This paper is concerned with the taxonomy of passive clauses in Japanese. I argue that Japanese passives should be divided, at least for descriptive purposes, into three classes that result from the interaction of two distinctions that will be referred to as “argument/adjunct” and “obligatory/optional.” In many previous studies, it is assumed, either explicitly or implicitly, that arguments are obligatory whereas adjuncts are optional. It will be shown that several properties of Japanese passives, which will be observed in the following sections, are difficult to account for in an analysis based on this dubious assumption.

One distinction that has been established in Japanese grammar is that between direct and indirect passives. The direct passive is exemplified by the sentence in (1).

- (1) John-ga Bill-ni nagur-are-ta.  
J.-NOM B.-DAT hit-PASS-PAST  
'John was hit by Bill.'

In the direct passive, the surface subject corresponds to the internal argument of the verb, while the external argument is linked to the NP marked by the dative case particle *-ni* (referred to here as the “demoted subject”<sup>1</sup>). Hence the meaning of (1) is roughly the same as that of the active counterpart *Bill-ga John-o nagur-ta* ‘Bill hit John’. In this respect, direct passives are similar

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<sup>1</sup> If a verb undergoes passivization, the external argument is suppressed (see e.g. Jaeggli 1986). The suppressed external argument is either left syntactically unencoded or linked to an oblique which otherwise appears in subject position. Hence the term “demoted subject.” When this term is misleading, however, I will use the term “agentive phrase” instead.

to passives in other languages. On the other hand, indirect passives, illustrated by the examples in (2), do not have active counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

- (2) a. John-ga hitobanzuyu Mary-ni nak-are-ta.  
 J.-NOM all night M.-DAT cry-PASS-PAST  
 'John was adversely affected by Mary's crying all night.'
- b. John-ga Mary-ni me-no mae-de hana-o kam-are-ta.  
 J.-NOM M.-DAT eye-GEN front-LOC nose-ACC blow-PASS-PAST  
 'John was adversely affected by Mary's blowing her nose in his presence.'

This is evident from the fact that an intransitive verb like *nak-* 'cry' can appear in the indirect passive, as in (2a). Moreover, (2b) shows that when the verb in an indirect passive is transitive, the internal argument is realized as usual, as an accusative object.<sup>3</sup>

There are empirical reasons to believe that demoted subjects are arguments in indirect passives, while they are adjuncts in direct passives (see section 4 for further discussion). What I will take issue with here is the assumption that this difference is reflected in the obligatory/optional distinction of demoted subjects. For example, Miyagawa (1989) and Shibatani (1990) argue that demoted subjects are obligatory in indirect passives but optional in direct passives. However, it is far from clear that the argument/adjunct and obligatory/optional distinctions are thus parallel. Arguments may be obligatory or optional, depending on the predicates that select them. The same holds true for adjuncts. As Grimshaw and Vikner (1993) point out, adjuncts, though optional in most cases, can become obligatory elements in one syntactic environment, that is, the passive construction. In fact, direct passives divide into those which have an obligatory demoted subject and those which have an optional demoted subject.

<sup>2</sup> One might say that indirect passives are so different from standard passives that they should not even be considered to be constructions of the same general type. However, as Washio (1990) points out, indirect passives show the effect of the "1-Advancement Exclusiveness Law" (Perlmutter and Postal 1984), which suggests that the external argument is subject to suppression, which in turn brings about subject demotion. Given that subject demotion is a defining property of the passive (Comrie 1977), indirect passives can be subsumed under the class of passive constructions.

<sup>3</sup> Despite their formal similarity to indirect passives with transitive verbs, possessor passives, as exemplified by a sentence like *Mary-ga Bill-ni kao-o but-are-ta* 'Mary was hit in the face by Bill', are assumed to be a subclass of direct passives (cf. Shibatani 1990 and the references cited therein). See also Washio (1993) for a discussion of possessor passives and their cross-linguistic significance from a broader perspective.

My proposal is quite simple. The obligatory/optional distinction should be dissociated from the argument/adjunct distinction. They interact to the extent that obligatory demoted subjects contrast with optional demoted subjects while forming a class with demoted subjects of indirect passives, the obligatoriness of which have long been noted (see, for example, Abe 1985).<sup>4</sup> In the following sections, I will provide evidence in support of the classification of Japanese passives based on the interaction between these two distinctions.

## 2 The Obligatory/Optional Distinction

Let us begin with the distinction between obligatory and optional demoted subjects. In this section, I will demonstrate that it is necessary to distinguish between the following direct passives both syntactically and semantically:

- (3) a. John-ga gootoo-ni satugais-are-ta.  
 J.-NOM robber-DAT kill-PASS-PAST  
 'John was killed by the robber.'  
 b. John-ga yabuisya-ni sinsatus-are-ta.  
 J.-NOM charlatan-DAT examine-PASS-PAST  
 'John was examined by the charlatan.'

Three pieces of evidence are given to show that the demoted subject of (3a) is optional, while the demoted subject of (3b) is obligatory.

First, the difference between the demoted subjects manifests itself in the contrast in the interpretation of the short passives in (4).

- (4) a. John-ga satugais-are-ta.  
 J.-NOM kill-PASS-PAST  
 'John was killed (by someone).'  
 b. John-ga sinsatus-are-ta.  
 J.-NOM examine-PASS-PAST  
 'John was examined (by him/her/them/etc.).'

In (4a), the missing demoted subject does not refer to any specific individual, so that the sentence as a whole has a meaning that can be rendered as 'John was killed by someone'. In (4b), however, the missing demoted subject cannot receive such a reading, but rather must be taken to be co-referential with

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<sup>4</sup> There seems to be no empirical reason to posit the class of optional argument demoted subjects, at least in the grammar of Japanese. So I am assuming that demoted subjects are always syntactically indispensable to indirect passives.

some appropriate NP in the preceding discourse. As a result, (4b) is infelicitous, or at best incomplete, in discourse-initial position.

The demoted subject in (3b) is referred to here as "obligatory," because it is required to be syntactically present, whether it has a phonetic form or not. On the other hand, the demoted subject in (3a) is optional: when it is left out, it can have unspecified reference.<sup>5</sup>

A second difference between the obligatory and optional demoted subjects is that only the obligatory demoted subject can be relativized. Hence, the contrast between (5a) and (5b).

- (5) a. \*John-ga satugais-are-ta gootoo  
 J.-NOM kill-PASS-PAST robber  
 'the robber John was killed by'
- b. ?John-ga sinsatus-are-ta yabusiya  
 J.-NOM examine-PASS-PAST charlatan  
 'the charlatan John was examined by'

It is worth noting here that Inoue (1976) argued that it is impossible to relativize demoted subjects. In fact, some speakers do not accept either sentence in (5). Although judgments are delicate and vary from example to example, the relative clauses in noun phrases like (6a)-(6c) sound natural, at least for this speaker.

- (6) a. Mary-ga kudok-are-ta otoko  
 M.-NOM seduce-PASS-PAST man  
 'the man who Mary was seduced by'
- b. musume-ga misome-rare-ta wakamono  
 daughter-NOM fall in love at first sight-PASS-PAST young man  
 Lit. 'the young man who my daughter was fallen in love with at first sight by'
- c. Bill-ga sodate-rare-ta roohuuu  
 B.-NOM raise-PASS-PAST old man and wife  
 'the old man and wife who Bill was brought up by'

Thus, relativization of demoted subjects should be counted as a legitimate grammatical operation.

The final grammatical phenomenon that lends support to the distinction between the obligatory and optional demoted subjects is that the obligatory

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<sup>5</sup> The point of my claim here is that the non-specific indefinite interpretation is available only to missing optional demoted subjects. Obligatory demoted subjects can, of course, be left unmentioned.

demoted subject can be the subject of a secondary predicate like *hadaka-de* 'nude' or *hudangi-de* 'in everyday clothes', while the optional demoted subject cannot. Thus, the secondary predicate of (7b), but not that of (7a), can describe how the agent looked when (s)he did the action named by the verb (or verb phrase).<sup>6</sup>

- (7) a. *John-ga* *gootoo-ni* **hadaka-de** *satugais-are-ta.*  
 J.-NOM robber-DAT nude kill-PASS-PAST  
 b. *John-ga* *isy-a-ni* **hudangi-de** *sinsatus-are-ta.*  
 J.-NOM doctor-DAT in everyday clothes examine-PASS-PAST

(7b) can be used to describe both a situation where the doctor wore everyday clothes when he or she examined John and a situation where John wore everyday clothes when he was examined. This contrasts with (7a), where it is John, not the robber, who must have been naked. Further examples are given in (8), where the preferred reading is the one in which the demoted subject serves as the subject of the secondary predicate.

- (8) a. *Mary-ga* *tikan-ni* **hadaka-de** *oikake-rare-ta.*  
 M.-NOM molester-DAT nude chase-PASS-PAST  
 'Mary was followed by a would-be molester, who was naked.'  
 b. *John-ga* *kodomo-ni* **bisyonure-de** *dakituk-are-ta.*  
 J.-NOM child-DAT wet hug-PASS-PAST  
 'John was hugged by his child, who was sopping wet.'  
 c. *Bill-ga* *okusan-ni* **pazyama-de** *demukae-rare-ta.*  
 B.-NOM wife-DAT in pajamas meet-PASS-PAST  
 'John was met at the doorway by his wife, who was in pajamas.'

These phenomena cannot be accounted for in an analysis that fails to distinguish between the direct passives in (3).<sup>7</sup> All direct passives should behave in the same way, all other things being equal, under any such analy-

<sup>6</sup> The secondary predicates are in bold type and their possible subjects in italic. For full discussion of secondary predicates in Japanese, see Koizumi (1994).

<sup>7</sup> Syntactic analyses of Japanese passives can be divided into two groups, uniform and non-uniform, depending on the structure that is assigned to direct passives. In non-uniform analyses, direct and indirect passives are treated differently (see McCawley 1972, Kuno 1973, among others). By contrast, uniform analyses assign the same syntactic structure to both passives, deriving their differences from something else (see Kuroda 1965, Howard and Niyekawa-Howard 1976, among others). Accordingly, there seems to be little agreement about which type of analysis is correct (see Washio 1990 and Hoshi 1991 for recent discussions). Be that as it may, the problem of the two direct passives, as mentioned in the text, remains to be solved.

sis. The classification of demoted subjects into obligatory and optional ones is necessary for a finer-grained description of direct passives. Moreover, as we will see in the next section, this classification also reveals that indirect passives show striking similarities to the variety of direct passive illustrated by (3b), but not to the other variety illustrated by (3a), in terms of the grammatical properties of their demoted subjects.

### 3 Indirect Passives

Just like the direct passive in (3b), indirect passives have an obligatory demoted subject: their demoted subjects are required to be syntactically present, whether they have a phonetic form or not. As expected, indirect passives, such as those in (9), exhibit the same behavior observed in (4b), (5b), and (7b).

- (9) a. John-ga Mary-ni zibun-no heya-de kubi-o tur-are-ta.  
 J.-NOM M-DAT self-GEN room-LOC neck-ACC hang-PASS-PAST  
 'John suffered from Mary's hanging herself in his room.'  
 b. John-ga Mary-ni hitobanzuyu sawag-are-ta.  
 J.-NOM M-DAT all night make a noise-PASS-PAST  
 'John suffered from Mary's making a noise all night.'

First, if the demoted subject is missing in an indirect passive, it must be understood as co-referential with an appropriate NP in the preceding discourse and cannot be interpreted as non-specific:<sup>8</sup>

- (10) a. \*John-ga zibun-no heya-de kubi-o tur-are-ta.  
 J.-NOM self-GEN room-LOC neck-ACC hang-PASS-PAST  
 'John suffered from someone's hanging herself in his room.'  
 b. \*John-ga hitobanzuyu sawag-are-ta.  
 J.-NOM all night make a noise-PASS-PAST  
 'John suffered from someone's making a noise all night.'

Second, it is possible to relativize the demoted subject of the indirect passive:

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<sup>8</sup> The obligatory presence of the demoted subject in an indirect passive with an intransitive verb (e.g. 9a) is also noted in Abe (1985). The analysis that he proposed within the framework of categorial grammar, however, does not allow for the obligatory demoted subject of a transitive-based indirect passive such as (9b).



- (11) a. John-ga zibun-no heya-de kubi-o tur-are-ta zyosei  
 J.-NOM self-GEN room-LOC neck-ACC hang-PASS-PAST woman  
 'the woman who John suffered from her hanging herself in his room'
- b. John-ga hitobanzuu sawag-are-ta kodomotati  
 J.-NOM all night make a noise-PASS-PAST children  
 'the children who John suffered from their making a noise all night'

Finally, in indirect passives, the demoted subject can serve as the subject of a secondary predicate, as in the following examples:

- (12) a. John-ga *Mary*-ni **hadaka-de** kubi-o tur-are-ta.  
 J.-NOM M.-DAT nude neck-ACC hang-PASS-PAST  
 'John suffered from Mary's hanging herself nude.'
- b. John-ga *Mary*-ni **hadaka-de** sawag-are-ta.  
 J.-NOM M.-DAT nude make a noise-PASS-PAST  
 'John suffered from Mary's making a noise nude.'

These observations suggest that the indirect passives in (9) should be grouped together with the direct passive in (3b) and not with the direct passive in (3a), as the demoted subject of (3a) exhibits the opposite behavior in the relevant syntactic environments (cf. (4a), (5a), and (7a)). This lends further support to the conclusion that it is necessary to postulate the distinction between obligatory and optional demoted subjects. Such a classification not only accounts for the difference between the two varieties of direct passive but also yields insights into the relationship between direct and indirect passives.

Considering only the data presented so far, an alternative analysis suggests itself. If the obligatory demoted subject of the direct passive always patterns with the demoted subject of the indirect passive, perhaps they are both arguments while the optional demoted subject of the direct passive is an adjunct. This would run counter to the general consensus that demoted subjects of indirect passives are arguments while demoted subjects of direct passives are adjuncts, but the obligatory/optional distinction could be dispensed with. However, the obligatory demoted subject of the direct passive and the demoted subject of the indirect passive do not always pattern together, and both distinctions (argument/adjunct and obligatory/optional) are in fact necessary. Evidence for this claim is presented in the next section.

#### 4 Argument and Adjunct Demoted Subjects

Despite having some common properties, indirect passives can be differentiated from direct passives with an obligatory demoted subject. One difference is that the demoted subject can bind the reflexive form *zibun* 'self' in an indirect passive but not in a direct passive, as is evident from the contrast in (13), where the possible antecedents of *zibun* are italicized:<sup>9</sup>

- (13) a. *Mary-ga John-ni zibun-no heya-de kudok-are-ta.*  
 M.-NOM J.-DAT self-GEN room-LOC seduce-PASS-PAST  
 'Mary was seduced by John in her room.'
- b. *Mary-ga John-ni zibun-no heya-de sawag-are-ta.*  
 M.-NOM J.-DAT self-GEN room-LOC make a noise-PASS-PAST  
 'Mary suffered from John's horseplay in his/her room.'

In (13a), *zibun* must be bound by, and thus co-referential with, the derived subject *Mary*. In (13b), on the other hand, both the surface subject *Mary* and the demoted subject *John* can be the antecedent of the reflexive. Note that *zibun* is subject-oriented; that is, its antecedent must be a subject NP (Kuno 1973:ch. 25). Consequently, the demoted subject of the indirect passive in (13b) has the status of a subject, while that of the direct passive in (13a) does not.

The demoted subject of the indirect passive in (13b) is an argument, since it has the status of a subject. The subject is an argument par excellence in Japanese, a language that lacks expletives. As for the demoted subject of the direct passive in (13a), on the other hand, it is still unclear whether it is an argument or an adjunct. What is clear is only that it is not a subject, and, of course, a non-subject is not necessarily an adjunct. As I argue in the remainder of this section, however, there is reason to believe that the demoted subject of the direct passive is an adjunct: it has an identifying characteristic of what Grimshaw and Vikner (1993) refer to as an "obligatory adjunct."

An obligatory adjunct, in the sense of Grimshaw and Vikner, is an adjunct that is required to be syntactically present unless there is another adjunct in the sentence in which it appears. According to them, obligatory

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<sup>9</sup> Kitagawa and Kuroda (1992) point out a number of direct passives in which the demoted subject can be understood as the antecedent of *zibun*, so as to back up the uniform theory (see fn. 7). The observation that they made of anaphoric binding in Japanese passives runs counter to the traditionally adopted contrast mentioned in the text and urges reconsideration of the discussion of the present paper. However, a careful examination of their claim is beyond the scope of this paper.

adjuncts can only be observed in certain passives. In English, for example, the *by*-phrase is indispensable to a passive sentence like *He was brought up by his parents*. However, in the presence of an adverbial element like *in Cambridge*, the *by*-phrase becomes optional, as is clear from the acceptability of *He was brought up in Cambridge*.<sup>10</sup>

As we observed in (6a), the agent taken by the verb *kudok-* 'seduce' is obligatory even in a passive clause. Thus the demoted subject *John-ni* of the direct passive in (14a) must be present, as is clear from the fact that the short passive in (14b) is unacceptable or, at best, sounds incomplete, especially in discourse-initial position. (14c) indicates, however, that the occurrence of an additional adverbial adjunct such as *gakkoo-de* 'in school' renders the demoted subject optional, exactly as Grimshaw and Vikner argue is characteristic of obligatory adjuncts.

- (14) a. Mary-ga John-ni kudok-are-ta.  
 M.-NOM teacher-DAT seduce-PASS-PAST  
 'Mary was seduced by John.'
- b. \*Mary-ga kudok-are-ta.  
 M.-NOM seduce-PASS-PAST  
 'Mary was seduced by someone.'
- c. Mary-ga gakkoo-de kudok-are-ta.  
 M.-NOM school-LOC seduce-PASS-PAST  
 'Mary was seduced (by someone) on campus.'

Demoted subjects of indirect passives are obligatory, just as the demoted subject of the direct passive in (14a) is. Thus, the demoted subject is indispensable to the indirect passive in (15a), and the short passive in (15b) cannot have the missing demoted subject interpreted with non-specific reference. However, the demoted subject of the indirect passive, unlike the demoted subject of the direct passive, is still required to be present even if there is another adverbial adjunct in the sentence, as shown by (15c), which contrasts with (14c).<sup>11</sup> This is because the demoted subject of the indirect

<sup>10</sup> These examples are taken from Mihailovic (1966). The existence of obligatory adjuncts are also noted in Gross (1979:864-5) and Jaeggli (1986:fn. 13).

<sup>11</sup> The data are delicate here, especially (15c), and some speakers might object to my judgements of the examples. I suspect that (15c) is allowed to appear discourse-initially given an appropriate context. A closer inspection leads to the conclusion that this is the case if the hearer is able to infer the individual that the speaker intends to refer to with the missing demoted subject. Suppose, for example, that Mary rented rooms to university students and that she often suffers from their horseplay. If the speaker assumes that the hearer knows this fact for certain and is able to recover the

passive, having the status of a subject, is an argument as opposed to an adjunct, as discussed at the outset of this section.

- (15) a. Mary-ga John-ni sawag-are-ta.  
 M.-NOM husband-DAT make a noise-PASS-PAST  
 'Mary suffered from John's horseplay.'
- b. \*Mary-ga sawag-are-ta.  
 M.-NOM make a noise-PASS-PAST  
 'Mary suffered from someone's horseplay.'
- c. \*Mary-ga hitobanzuu sawag-are-ta.  
 M.-NOM all night make a noise-PASS-PAST  
 'Mary suffered from someone's horseplay all night.'

To sum up, the demoted subject of the direct passive in (14a) must be distinguished from the demoted subject of the indirect passive in (15a) in two ways: first, in that it is a non-subject, as we discussed in (13) (but see also fn. 9), and second, in that it is an obligatory adjunct, as shown by the contrast between (14b) and (14c). Since all the examples of direct passives that were adduced in this section are those which have an obligatory demoted subject, it is not yet clear whether optional demoted subjects, which occur in direct passives such as *John-ga gootoo-ni koros-are-ta* 'John was killed by a robber', are also adjuncts or not. Without evidence to the contrary, however, I assume that optional demoted subjects are adjuncts as well, and all direct passives are to be differentiated from indirect passives in terms of the argument/adjunct distinction of demoted subjects.

## 5 Concluding Remarks

This paper demonstrated that direct passives are divided into two classes, depending on the types of the demoted subjects that they have, and that direct passives with an obligatory demoted subject, unlike those with an optional demoted subject, form a class with indirect passives in terms of such grammatical phenomena as short passives, relative clause formation, and secondary predication. All these observations are difficult to handle in an analysis that is based only on the distinction between direct and indirect passives or between argument and adjunct demoted subjects, suggesting that another distinction is to be postulated, at least for descriptive purposes, that

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missing demoted subject, then (15c) will be felicitous without any preceding discourse. Note, however, that this reading crucially differs from the non-specific reading that I have discussed with regard to demoted subjects.

is orthogonal to these distinctions, for example, the obligatory/optional distinction that we have argued for in this paper.

Many of the facts about demoted subjects of Japanese passives that were reported in this paper (especially, (4)-(8) and (11)) are, to my knowledge, unnoticed in earlier studies. It remains to be seen, however, where the cluster of their grammatical properties comes from. This question is closely related to another question concerning the obligatory/optional distinction of demoted subjects. We will have to know in the first place whether the obligatory/optional presence of a demoted subject in a passive clause is determined in an arbitrary fashion or by some deep-seated principle(s). Giving an explicit answer to these questions is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this paper, and the issues are left for future research.

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