

Indirect Passives and Relational Nouns (I)

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Abstract

It is generally acknowledged that Japanese has two kinds of passives, direct passives and indirect passives. We have argued in another paper that direct passives involve an existential quantification and decrease the number of the arguments by one. In the present paper, we claim that a new argument is added to the predicate in indirect passives. Though the indirect passive of an intransitive verb is simply an operation of adding a new argument, in the case of the indirect passive of a transitive verb, this operation is usually coupled with the existential quantification which is found in direct passives, and hence there is no change in the number of the arguments. We also claim that the indirectness of indirect passives consists in that the newly added argument expresses the indirect theme of the reported event, which has some close relation with an element of the same event denoted by the old argument.

1 Introduction

It is a well known fact about Japanese that it has “indirect” passives like (2) as well as “direct” passives like (1)¹.

- (1) Taro ga shika- rare- ta.
NOM scold PASSIVE PAST
(Taro was scolded.)
- (2) Taro ga seito ni nak- are- ta.
NOM pupil(s) DAT cry PASSIVE PAST
(Taro suffered a/some/the pupil’s/pupils’ crying.)

It is noteworthy that the passive-forming particle “rare” is applicable to both a transitive verb “shikaru” (scold) and an intransitive verb like “naku” (cry).

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¹ Although we use notations like “NOM (nominative)” and “ACC (accusative)” commenting on example sentences in Japanese, they are used only to give some approximate hint to the function of a Japanese case particle. We do not assume that there is some universal case system common to natural languages; cases are treated as entirely internal to each language.

An intransitive verb can be regarded as a predicate with one argument. A transitive verb may be regarded as a predicate with more than two arguments. “Shikaru” (scold) in (1) is a predicate with two arguments, while “okuru” (give a present of) has three arguments. An indirect passive construction is applicable to transitive verbs with two or three arguments as well as intransitive verbs. (3) is an indirect passive with a two argument verb “shikaru”, and (4) is the same with a three argument verb “okuru”.

- (3) Hanako wa sensei ni kodomo o
TOP teacher(s) DAT child(ren) ACC
home-rare-ta.
praise PASSIVE PAST
(Hanako had her child(ren) praised by a/some/the teacher(s).)
- (4) Hanako wa kodomo ga hana o
TOP child(ren) NOM flower(s) OBJ
tomodachi kara oku-rare-ta.
friend(s) from present PASSIVE PAST
(Hanako had her child(ren) presented with flower(s) from friend(s).)

I start with an indirect passive that comes from an intransitive verb, because it is much simpler than another case, namely, the indirect passive of a transitive verb, which is a sort of hybrid form, as we are going to see.

2 Indirect passives of intransitive verbs

As I argued in the companion piece to the present paper ([Iida 2011]), a direct passive in Japanese should be regarded as an operation which decreases the number of the arguments of the predicate by one; semantically, it is an existential quantification.

In contrast to this, it is obvious that a new argument is introduced by the use of the passive particle “rare” in an indirect passive like (2). Compare (2) with the following.

- (5) Seito ga nai ta.
pupil(s) NOM cry PAST
(A/Some/The pupil/pupils cried.)

Let us consider a particular conversational situation in which (2) is uttered. In order to fix the interpretation, suppose that “seito” uttered refers to a particular pupil A, who is known to both a speaker and a hearer. In that situation, (5) may be inferred from (2), provided that the reference of “seito” remains unchanged. By uttering (5), we report the obtaining of certain events, namely, a single event or several events of A’s crying. If (2) is uttered in the same situation, it reports the same event or events, but with an additional element.

What is this additional element? An indirect passive is sometimes called “passive of *meiwaku* (sufferance, annoyance, trouble)”. It is because the events reported in the sentences with indirect passive constructions are often those events which affect the subjects denoted by the nouns with the nominative case particle “*ga*” (or, the topic particle “*wa*” which replaces “*ga*”) in a negative way. For example, the sentence (2) says that the person referred to by “Taro” suffered a pupil’s crying. Here are similar examples.

- (6) Taro wa oya ni shin- are- ta.
TOP parent(s) DAT die PASSIVE PAST
(Taro suffered his parent(s)’s death.)
- (7) Taro wa ame ni fu- rare- ta.
TOP rain DAT fall PASSIVE PAST
(Taro suffered a rain.)

However, as is shown by (3) and (4), it is not always the case that the subjects are affected in negative ways. The subject of these sentences was affected by what had happened to her child or children, but she would welcome what had happened.

Thus, when the passive particle “rare” is used in an indirect passive construction, it introduces a subject who is affected in a certain way by an event described by a verb it attaches to.

As we have done in the previous paper ([Iida 2011, p.28]), the intransitive verb “*naku*” (cry) is formally represented as follows:

$$\mathbf{naku}(X^{ga}),$$

where “*X*” is a plural variable, or rather a number-neutral variable. We use plural logic as the logic of our metalanguage, and capital letter variables like “*X*” and “*Y*” are plural variables, while lower case variables like “*x*” and “*e*” are singular variables. We put a case particle to a variable as a superscript in order to indicate the case of the argument it occupies. Thus, from the representation of “*naku*” above we may know that

1. “*naku*” is a one place verb, or an intransitive verb, and that
2. its unique argument is number-neutral and takes the nominative case.

If we attach the passive particle to “*naku*”, we get the indirect passive form “*nakareru*”, whose formal representation will be given in the following.

$$(\mathbf{naku}(X^{ga}))\mathbf{rare}(Y)$$

This is transformed into a two place predicate in which the argument “*Y*” newly gets a nominative case and “*X*” becomes dative (“*ni*”-case):

$$\mathbf{nakareru}(X^{ni}; Y^{ga}),$$

where the notation “ $(X; Y)$ ” means that the order of two variables “ X ” and “ Y ” is irrelevant. In general, we use the notation like

$$\mathbf{v}(A_1; A_2; \dots; A_n)$$

to indicate that the arguments A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n can be interchanged freely in any order. There is no reason to prefer a particular ordering in exhibiting the arguments of a verb, as the cases of the arguments are indicated by case particles in Japanese.

From the formal representation of “nakareru”, the indirect passive of the intransitive verb “naku”, we can see that it is a two place predicate and one of its two arguments takes a dative case (“ni”-case) and another a nominative case.

So, the “rare” of an indirect passive increases the number of the predicate by one. On the other hand, the “rare” of a direct passive decreases the number of the predicate by one. Take “shikarareru” (is scolded) as an example. It is formed from “shikaru” (scold) by putting “rare”.

$$(\mathbf{shikaru}(X^{\text{ga}}; Y^{\text{o}}))\mathbf{rare}_X$$

Here the first argument of “shikaru” is bound by “rare” and the result is a single argument predicate

$$\mathbf{shikarareru}(Y^{\text{ga}}).$$

Now let us turn to the semantics of the indirect passive particle “rare” when it is applied to an intransitive verb.

Our style of giving the semantics of an expression is through the use of a relation called “semantic value relation”. It is a relation between an expression and an entity or entities, and written as

$$V(X, \alpha),$$

and read as “ X is/are (a) semantic value(s) of α ”. The semantics of an expression is given by specifying a semantic value relation for that expression.

Let us start with the semantics of an intransitive verb like “naku” (cry). There are two kinds of verbs in Japanese; one kind is a verb like “naku”, which is used to report an event, while another kind is a verb like “iru” (stay), which is used to report a state. We suppose a semantic value of a verb of the first kind is an event. Thus,

$$(8) V(e, \mathbf{naku}(X^{\text{ga}})) \Leftrightarrow e \text{ is a crying event and } X \text{ is/are the agent(s) of } e.$$

We claim that the semantics of the indirect passive of “naku” is given by the following:

(9) $V(e, (\mathbf{naku}(X^{\text{ga}})\mathbf{rare}(Y))) \Leftrightarrow V(e, \mathbf{naku}(X^{\text{ga}}))$ and Y is/are the indirect theme(s) of e .

Putting (8) and (9) together, we get

(10) $V(e, (\mathbf{naku}(X^{\text{ga}})\mathbf{rare}(Y))) \Leftrightarrow e$ is a crying event, X is/are the agent(s) of e , and Y is/are the indirect theme(s) of e .

Let us take again our example sentence (2):

(2) Taro ga seito ni nak- are- ta.
 NOM pupil(s) DAT cry PASSIVE PAST
 (Taro suffered a/some/the pupil's/pupils' crying.)

“Seito” can be interpreted either as a definite or an indefinite noun phrase. If we interpret it as indefinite, then our semantics gives (2) the following truth condition.

For some X , X are pupils, and there was a crying event whose agents are X and indirect theme is Taro.

Let us state the semantics of “rare” applied to an intransitive verb in the form of a semantic axiom.

Axiom (the indirect passive of an intransitive verb)

Let “ $\mathbf{v}(X^{\text{ga}})$ ” be a one place verb. Then,

$V(e, (\mathbf{v}(X^{\text{ga}})\mathbf{rare}(Y))) \Leftrightarrow V(e, \mathbf{v}(X^{\text{ga}}))$ and Y is/are the indirect theme of e .

3 Indirect passives of transitive verbs

Given the analysis of the indirect passive of an intransitive verb in the previous section, you might think that there will be nothing new in the case of the indirect passive of a transitive verb; if the indirect passive is simply an operation which increases the number of arguments by one, then it will turn a verb with two or three arguments into a predicate with three or four arguments. For example, the indirect passive form “home-rare-” in (3) is a predicate with three arguments which are expressed by “Hanako”, “sensei” (teacher(s)), and “kodomo” (child(ren)), while the original transitive verb “homeru” (praise) has only two arguments.

However, if we look at the matter more closely, it turns out that such a view is too simple. Consider the following (11) which is slightly different from (3).

(11) Hanako wa kodomo o home- rare- ta.
 TOP child(ren) ACC praise PASSIVE PAST

(Hanako had her child(ren) praised.)

(11) differs from (3) in that it lacks the phrase “sensei ni” (by a/the teacher(s)). What we should ask now is whether (11) is incomplete because it lacks this phrase. Can’t we understand what (11) says without knowing who praised the child or children? I suppose the answer is yes.

Now it is absolutely necessary to remember what happens in the case of a direct passive. We argued in our previous work that the direct passive is semantically an existential quantification and therefore the quantified argument is no longer an argument of the predicate in the direct passive form.

I claim that the indirect passive of a transitive verb also involves such a quantification as well as an introduction of a new argument for an indirect theme. A quantification decreases the number of arguments by one, but it is compensated by the introduction of a new argument, and hence the number of the arguments remains the same after all. In (11), Hanako is introduced as the indirect theme of the event of her child’s or children’s being scolded, while the agent or agents of the event is existentially quantified and disappear from the sentence.

In order to make clear this double function the indirect passive of a transitive verb has, let us represent the indirect passive particle “rare” in the following way.

rare_X(Y)

Please recall that “**rare_X**” is the formal representation of the direct passive particle “rare”, where “*X*” indicates the argument of the verb that is existentially quantified by the direct passive operation. In the representation of the indirect passive “rare” above, “*X*” works just as it does in the direct passive “rare” and “*Y*” stands for the newly introduced argument for the indirect theme.

Using such a device, an indirect passive “homerareru” as appears in (11) may be formally represented as below.

(homeru(*X*^{ga}; *Y*^o))rare_X(*Z*)

Although a new argument *Z* is introduced, the old argument “*X*” is quantified and the resulting predicate

homerareru(*Z*^{ga}; *Y*^o)

is two place not three place.

It is instructive to compare the occurrence of “homerareru” in (11) with that in the following sentence, which is in direct passive form.

(12) Hanako ga home- rare- ta
 NOM praise PASSIVE PAST

(Hanako was praised.)

“homerareru” in (12) is represented as

$$(\mathbf{homeru}(X^{ga}; Y^o))\mathbf{rare}_X,$$

which is transformed into a one place predicate

$$\mathbf{homerareru}(Y^{ga})$$

The two different forms of “homerareru” should make clear the difference between the direct and indirect forms of passives.

Why should we think that the indirect passive of a transitive verb involves an existential quantification? There are two arguments for it, just as it was in the case of the direct passive ([Iida 2011, pp.22–7]).

First, in order to understand the utterance of (11), you don’t need any background information as to who did the praising; you don’t need to know even that somebody did the praising. In contrast to this, suppose you hear someone utter the following sentence.

- (13) kodomo o home- rare- ta.
child(ren) ACC praise PASSIVE PAST
(Had child(ren) praised.)

If this is not the first person statement or one of the exceptional cases we are going to explain, you can always ask the speaker the identity of the person or persons whose child or children were praised and the speaker should be able to supply the answer. The exceptional case is the case where the hearer knows only that somebody (or something) relating to somebody was praised and the speaker knows who this person is (or, what this thing is). In this case, the speaker and hearer should share a belief that can be expressed by the following.

- (14) dareka ga dareka (nanika) o
somebody NOM somebody (something) ACC
home- rare- ta.
praise PASSIVE PAST
(Somebody had something praised.)

Consider our indirect passive sentence (11). It is true that you can ask the utterer of (11) who praised Hanako’s children. But the answer to your question might be that the speaker does not know who did that, and her answer is quite all right. Moreover, you don’t need to know that there was some praising going on, namely, you don’t need to believe that (14) is true before you hear and understand the utterance of (11).

Secondly, you can infer (15)

- (15) Hanako to Taro wa kodomo o
 and TOP child(ren) ACC
 home- rare- ta.
 praise PASSIVE PAST
 (Hanako and Taro had her child(ren) praised.)

from the utterances of (11) together with that of the following

- (16) Taro wa kodomo o home- rare- ta.
 TOP child(ren) ACC praise PASSIVE PAST
 (Taro had her child(ren) praised.)

If the indirect passive “homerareru” were a three place predicate, then the missing arguments in (11) and (16) had to be understood contextually. In that case, the inference from (11) and (16) to (15) would be licensed only when those arguments understood contextually are the same. Hence, the fact that the inference from (11) and (16) to (15) is always possible refutes the hypothesis that the indirect passive “homerareru” is a three place predicate.

There are, however, some cases where existential quantification is not involved in the formation of indirect passive of a transitive verb. In such cases, the resulting predicate acquires a new argument and has more arguments than the original transitive verb. The following sentence, which is suggested by a similar sentence in [Hasegawa 1999] (at p.136), gives us an example.

- (17) Hanako wa kodomo ni jibun no heya
 TOP child(ren) DAT self GEN room
 de neko o kaw- are- ta.
 LOC cat(s) ACC keep PASSIVE PAST
 (Hanako was annoyed by her child(ren)’s keeping a cat/cats in her
 (or its/their) room.)

Hasegawa argues that “kodomo ni” in (17) is not a postpositional phrase but a noun phrase, because “jibun” may refer to “kodomo” as well as “Hanako”. She holds that a noun phrase should have a corresponding argument in the verbal predicate it attaches to; hence, if “kodomo ni” is a noun phrase in (17), then “kaware-” should have an argument which is bound by “kodomo”, and “kaware-” should be a three place predicate.

Moreover, if we consider the sentence

- (18) Hanako wa neko o kaw- are- ta,
 TOP cat(s) ACC keep PASSIVE PAST
 (Hanako was annoyed by (who?) keeping a cat / cats.)

we find that its behavior with two tests is different from that of (11). In order to understand the utterance of (18), we will need to know who did the cat keeping; when we are given another sentence which is the same as (18) except that it has Taro as its subject, we cannot infer that Hanako and Taro are both annoyed by the cat keeping as we can do so with (11) and (16).

Hence, we might conclude that the indirect passive “kaware-” in (17) and (18) is a three place predicate, whose formal representation should be in the following line.

$$(\mathbf{kaw-}(X^{\text{ga}}; Y^{\text{o}}))\mathbf{rare}(Z),$$

which turns into

$$\mathbf{kaware}(X^{\text{ni}}; Y^{\text{o}}; Z^{\text{ga}}).$$

Is there some feature common to the indirect passives which do not involve existential quantification? What makes the difference between an argument which can be existentially quantified and an argument which cannot be so? One hypothesis is that if a newly introduced argument is related to the old argument in a way typical of indirect passive construction, that old argument will not be quantified away and remain as an argument of the predicate. If you look at (17) you will notice that “kodomo” should be closely related to the newly introduced argument Hanako, while “neko” might refer to a cat (cats) totally unknown to Hanako. In a typical case of indirect passive of a transitive verb, the argument which has a close relation to the new argument is not an agent argument but a theme argument. This is not the case with (17); as we have seen just now, Hanako should be closely connected with “kodomo” which is an agent argument, though she may not have any close relation with the theme argument “neko”. We will return to this kind of indirect passives in the next section.

If we put aside those cases we have just discussed, we might say that the number of the arguments does not change in general when a two place verb is turned into an indirect passive form. The situation is just the same with a three place verb: the number of the arguments does not change in general by indirect passive construction. “Okuru” in the sense of presenting something to somebody is a three place verb. In the following sentences, while (19) is in active voice, (20) and (21) are in indirect voice. We suppose that the child or children referred to in (19) are related to Hanako in a certain way, in order to make an inference from (19) to (20) or (21) possible.

- (19) Taro ga kodomo ni hana o okut- ta.
 NOM child(ren) DAT flower ACC present PAST
 (Taro presented flowers to a/the child(ren).)

(20) Hanako wa kodomo ni hana o
TOP child(ren) DAT flower ACC
oku- rare- ta.
send PASSVE PAST
(Hanako had her child(ren) presented with flowers.)

(21) Hanako wa kodomo ga hana o
TOP child(ren) NOM flower ACC
oku- rare- ta.
send PASSVE PAST
(Hanako had her child(ren) presented with flowers.)

Although (20) and (21) are both possible forms of indirect passive, (20) is ambiguous and may be interpreted as a direct passive meaning that Hanako was presented flowers by the children. There is no such ambiguity in (21).

Formally, when the three place verb

$$\mathbf{okuru}(X^{\text{ga}}; Y^{\text{ni}}; Z^{\text{o}})$$

is turned into the indirect passive

$$(\mathbf{okuru}(X^{\text{ga}}; Y^{\text{ni}}; Z^{\text{o}}))\mathbf{rare}_X(W),$$

the resulting three place predicate is either

$$\mathbf{okurareru}(W^{\text{ga}}; Y^{\text{ni}}; Z^{\text{o}})^2$$

or

$$\mathbf{okurareru}(W^{\text{ga}}; Y^{\text{ga}}; Z^{\text{o}}).$$

We have not yet given the semantics of “rare” applied to a transitive verb. We give it for the case of a two place verb, as it is easy to extend it to the case of a three place verb.

Axiom (the indirect passive of a transitive verb)

Let “ $\mathbf{v}(X^{\text{ga}}; Y^{\text{ni}})$ ” be a two place verb where X stands for agents. Then,

$$V(e, (\mathbf{v}(X^{\text{ga}}; Y^{\text{ni}}))\mathbf{rare}_X(Z)) \Leftrightarrow \text{There are some } X \text{ such that } V(e, \mathbf{v}(X^{\text{ga}}; Y^{\text{ni}})) \text{ and } Z \text{ are the indirect theme of } e.$$

² If (20) is interpreted as a direct passive meaning that Hanako was presented flowers by the children, then instead of a three place predicate we will have a two place predicate

$$\mathbf{okurareru}(W^{\text{ga}}; Z^{\text{o}}),$$

where the argument “ Y ” is no longer there because it was existentially quantified. In the direct passive reading of (20), “kodomo ni” is a postpositional phrase and “ni” is not a case particle but a postposition.

4 What does the indirectness consist in?

An indirect passive construction produces a predicate with a new argument, whether it is applied to an intransitive verb or a transitive verb. We claimed that this new argument stands for the “indirect theme” of the event which is introduced by the verb. For example, in

- (2) Taro ga seito ni nak- are- ta.
NOM pupil(s) DAT cry PASSIVE PAST
(Taro suffered a/some/the pupil’s/pupils’ crying.)

the newly introduced argument Taro is the indirect theme of the event of, say, the pupil’s crying. Similarly, in

- (11) Hanako wa kodomo o home- rare- ta.
TOPIC child(ren) ACC praise PASSIVE PAST
(Hanako had her child(ren) praised.)

Hanako is the newly introduced argument, and she is the indirect theme of the event of her child’s (or children’s) being praised.

However, all we have at present is only a label. What is the indirect theme of an event? In particular, what does “indirect” mean?

Some³ claim that two different events are involved in an indirect passive construction. According to them, the sentence (2) reports an event of the pupil’s crying and another event that is Taro’s being affected by it. In general, an indirect passive “V + rare” reports an event V itself introduces and another event which is caused by it. Thus, we might characterize the indirect theme in the following way.

- (A) X is the indirect theme of an event e if and only if there exists an event e' such that e causes e' and X is the theme of e' .

Such a view might have some plausibility in a case like (2). We might be tempted to distinguish a pupil’s crying and Taro’s enduring it. But, can we always find the second event which is caused by the event reported by the embedded verb? Consider (6).

- (6) Taro wa oya ni shin- are- ta.
TOP parent(s) DAT die PASSIVE PAST
(Taro suffered his parent(s)’s death.)

Suppose that the speaker who utters (6) knows that Taro’s father died but that Taro does not know that his father died; Taro’s ignorance does not make the

³ One of my past selves is found among them. See [Iida 2011].

statement of (6) false. Then, what is the event that is caused by Taro’s father’s death and has Taro as its theme? You might wish to say that by his father’s death Taro becomes a person without a living father and such a change of Taro’s status counts as the event caused by the death of Taro’s father. But such an expedient seems to be a desperate one. This means that the so-called Cambridge change⁴ also counts as an event, and then for any X and any e you can always find some event which is a Cambridge change of X caused by e : If e occurs, then X undergoes a change from existing before e ’s occurrence to existing after e ’s occurrence. This means that there is no substance to the account (A).

Another way to explain the indirectness of an indirect passive is to look at the relation between the newly introduced argument (indirect theme) and some of the arguments that existed before, for example, the relation between Taro and “seito” (pupil(s)) in (2), Hanako and “sensei” (teacher(s)) or “kodomo” (child(ren)) in (3), Taro and “oya” (parent(s)) in (6), and so on. We immediately notice that there are some obvious relations between the newly introduced argument and some of older arguments. In (2) “seito” should be Taro’s pupil in some sense, and similarly “oya” in (6) should be Taro’s parent or parents.

Moreover, from a sentence in indirect passive, you can infer a sentence in direct passive in which the newly introduced argument is combined with one of the older arguments. Here is an example. From

- (11) Hanako wa kodomo o home- rare- ta.
TOP child(ren) ACC praise PASSIVE PAST
(Hanako had her child(ren) praised.)

we can infer

- (24) Hanako no kodomo ga home- rare- ta.
GEN child(ren) NOM praise PASSIVE PAST
(Hanako’s child(ren) was/were praised.)

While “homerareru” in (11) is in indirect passive and a two place predicate, “homerareru” in (2) is in direct passive and a monadic predicate. For any indirect passive formed from a transitive verb, such a correspondence between indirect passive and direct passive is found quite generally. Just as (24) is a valid consequence of (11), a direct passive sentence

- (25) Taro no e ga home- rare- ta.
GEN picture(s) NOM praise PASSIVE PAST
(Taro’s picture(s) was/were praised.)

is a valid consequence of an indirect passive sentence

⁴ [Geach 1969, pp.71f.]

- (26) Taro wa e o home- rare- ta.
TOP picture(s) ACC praise PASSIVE PAST
(Taro was praised for his picture(s).)

We can discern a general pattern from these examples. Namely, from a sentence in indirect passive of the form

- (a) NP₁ ga NP₂ o V rare- ta.
NOM ACC PASSIVE PAST

we may infer a sentence in direct passive of the form

- (b) NP₁ no NP₂ ga V rare- ta.
GEN NOM PASSIVE PAST

These correspondences suggest that the indirect themes of indirect passive is related to the themes of the events introduced by the original verbs; the indirect theme of (11), Hanako, may be the mother of the child or children which plays the role of theme for the verb “homeru” here; similarly, the indirect theme of (24), Taro, may be the author of the picture or pictures which were praised. We should also include the cases like (17), where the indirect theme is closely related to the agent. Hence, the relation between the indirect theme and those elements of the event first introduced by the original verb is determined by the context.

Hence, here is another account of the indirect theme.

- (B) X is the direct theme of an event e if and only if X has a certain relation with the direct theme or the agent of the event e .

There are two difficulties with this, however.

- (i) This account does not always apply to the indirect passive of an intransitive verb.
- (ii) Whether the present account can be revised or extended to be applicable to the intransitive verb case or not, there is too much vagueness in what “a certain relation” is. It is necessary to spell out what it is. In particular, we should spell out how it is determined contextually.

In the rest of this section, we are going to consider the first problem, and the second will be discussed in the next section.

The indirect passive of an intransitive verb like

- (6) Taro wa oya ni shin- are- ta.
TOP parent(s) DAT die PASSIVE PAST

(Taro suffered his parent(s)'s death.)

has the same characteristics as the indirect passive of a transitive verb in that there is an obvious connection between the newly introduced argument and the old argument. It also has a corresponding sentence which is its logical consequence; this time it is no longer in passive form because there cannot be a direct passive form for an intransitive verb.

(27) Taro no oya ga shin- da.
GEN parent(s) NOM die PAST
(Taro's parent(s)'s died.)

We might be tempted to suppose that there is a general pattern between an indirect passive sentence formed from an intransitive verb and a sentence which has the intransitive verb as its main predicate, which is exemplified by (6) and (27). In these cases, we may proceed from an indirect passive sentence of the form

(c) NP₁ ga NP₂ ni V rare- ta.
NOM DAT PASSIVE PAST

to a non-passive sentence of the form

(d) NP₁ no NP₂ ga V ta.
GEN NOM PAST

However, there are many examples of the indirect passive of an intransitive verb which do not have these characteristics. The most obvious example is (7).

(7) Taro wa ame ni fu- rare- ta.
TOP rain DAT fall PASSIVE PAST
(Taro suffered a rain.)

If we try to construct a sentence according a pattern found in a transition from (6) to (27), we will end up with (28), which does not make sense.

(28) Taro no ame ga fu- tta.
GEN rain NOM fall PAST
(?Taro's rain fell.)

Here are some further examples of indirect passives formed from intransitive verbs which the above pattern does not apply.

(29) Taro wa shiranai hito ni
TOP unacquainted person(s) DAT
yonaka ni sawag- are- ta.
midnight LOC make noise PASSIVE PAST
(Taro suffered from strangers' making noise in the midnight.)

(30) Hanako wa noraneko ni niwa de
TOP stray cat(s) DAT garden LOC
shin- are- ta.
die PASSIVE PAST
(Hanako had a stray cat die in her garden.)

There cannot be any close relation between Taro and strangers in (29) or Hanako and a stray cat in (30), and hence, it does not make sense to say “Taro no shiranai hito” (Taro’s stranger)⁵ or “Hanako no noraneko”(Hanako’s stray cat).

But, notice that there is a close relation between Hanako and “niwa” (garden) in (30); the garden in question must be Hanako’s. Similarly, if (27) is to make sense, it must be the case that the strangers made noise near the place where Taro was at the midnight in question. In these examples, the newly introduced arguments should be regarded as the participants of the reported events because they have some close ties with the locations the events took place and hence are influenced by them. Then, it is a natural idea to expand the account (B) into the following.

(C) *X* is the direct theme of an event *e* if and only if *X* has a certain relation with either the direct theme or the agent or the location of *e*.

This account nicely covers the frequently discussed example

(7) Taro wa ame ni fu- rare- ta.
TOP rain DAT fall PASSIVE PAST
(Taro suffered a rain.)

There are several possibilities for Taro to be the indirect theme of the event of rain’s falling; he himself might be at the time and place when it rains; or, Taro has some kind of interest in the place where it rains; or, some other event is going to take place when it rains. Thus, Taro can utter (7) either when he got wet in rain, or when it rained when he was drying his washings, or when it rained on the day he wanted to go cycling. In all these cases, Taro is the indirect theme of the event because the rain occurred in the location Taro has a strong interest in.

⁵ The phrase “Taro no shiranai hito” might also mean some person or persons Taro is not acquainted. But in this case “no” does not signal a genitive case, but a nominative case.

Even among the indirect passives coming from transitive verbs, we find those in which the newly introduced argument does not have any close relation with the old argument but has a strong connection with the location of the reported event. Here is an example.

- (31) Hanako wa gomi o niwa ni
 TOP garbage ACC garden DAT
 sute- rare- ta.
 throw away PASSIVE PAST
 (Hanako had some garbage dumped in her garden)

Obviously, Hanako has a close relation with the location of the event that is expressed by “niwa” (garden) and not with “gomi” (garbage).

We may conclude that the present account (C) of the indirect theme of an event applies to the indirect passives in general, whether it comes from an intransitive verb or a transitive verb.

References

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