

Some Potential Expressions in Japanese and English

Hiroshi YOSHIKAWA*

1. Introduction

It is said that there are various kinds of potential expressions in Japanese and English. For instance, an English potential sentence 1 can be roughly translated into the following three types of Japanese potential expression 2a, 2b, and 2c, though some linguists claim that they can recognize slight semantic differences among them.

(1) *Mr. Tanaka can speak English.*

(2) a. *Tanaka-san wa eigo ga hanas-(rar)e-ru.*

Tanaka-Mr.	TOPIC-	English	NOMINATIVE-	speak-can	-PRESENT-TENSE
	MARKER		MARKER		

b. *Tanaka-san wa eigo o hanasu koto ga deki-ru.*

Tanaka-Mr.	TOP-	English	OBJECT-	speak	NOMINALIZER	NOM-	able-PRES
	MARKER		MARKER			MARKER	

c. *Tanaka-san wa eigo o hanasu koto ga kanou -da.*

Tanaka-Mr.	TOP-	English	OBJ-	speak	NOMINAL	NOM-	possible-COPULA
	MARKER		MARKER			MARKER	

Like Japanese, other English potential sentences which are roughly equal to Example 1 in its semantic connotation, can be given as follows.

(3) a. *Mr. Tanaka is able to speak English.*

b. *It is possible that Mr. Tanaka speaks English.*

In this paper, I will mainly discuss Japanese *dekiru*-type potential expressions and aim to clarify their syntactic and semantic characteristics. Moreover, I will talk about other potential expressions in both Japanese and English when necessary.

2. Syntactic structure of Japanese potential expressions

2.1. Rare-type potential expressions

On a *rare*-type potential expression as in Example 2a, two different groups of lin-

*外国語系列 (Department of Foreign Languages)

guists hypothesized about its syntactic structure. One (eg. Shibatani) claims that *rare* is a transitive predicate and the structural configuration of 2a is roughly Figure 1. The other (eg. Kuno) gives the different configuration as in Figure 2, which shows that 2a is a complex sentence having an intransitive predicate *rare* in the main clause.

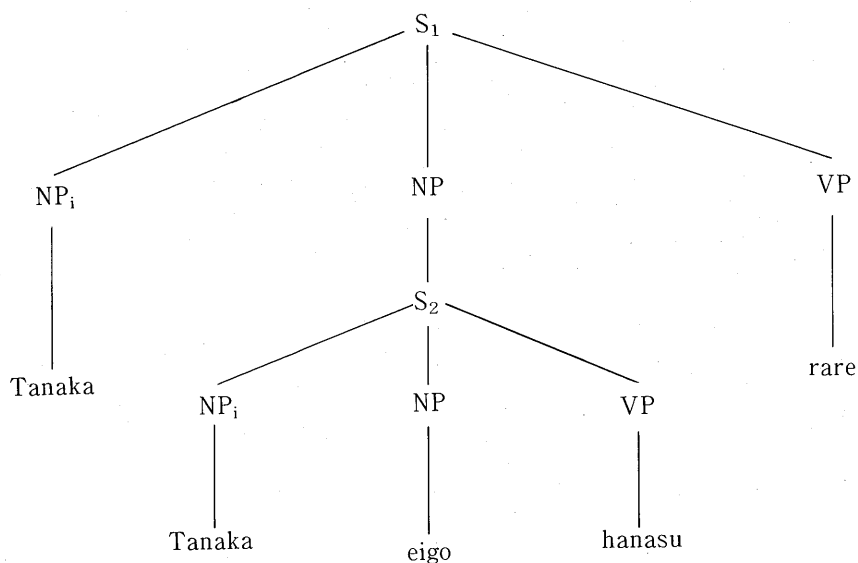


Figure 1

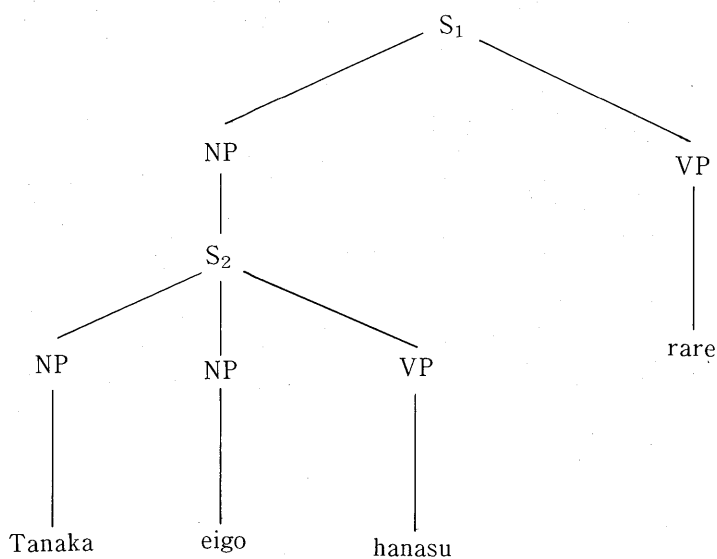


Figure 2

Both claims are still hypotheses and we haven't reached the final conclusion of this grammatical controversy. The fact that *rare* is used for expressing not only potentiality but also passivity, and honorification, makes this problem more complicated.¹⁾ I will not discuss this further in this paper.

2.2. *Dekiru*-type potential expressions

Since *dekiru* is etymologically derived from *ide* (appear) + *kuru* (come), it also means generation or production, as in Example 4.

- (4) a. *Kanojo ni kodomo ga deki-ta.* (She had a baby.)
 she DATIVE- child NOM- can-PAST TENSE
 MARKER MARKER

- b. *ekimae ni hiroba ga deki-ta.*
 in-front-of- LOCATIVE- plaza NOM- can-PAST
 the-station MARKER MARKER

(A plaza was constructed in front of the station.)

It can be inferred that this usage of *dekiru* generated that of potentiality in the process of semantic change. However, I will chiefly discuss the latter usage in this paper.

We can see some potential sentences in which *dekiru* is used as the main verb of a simple sentence as in 5a and 5b.

- (5) a. *Kanojo wa furansugo ga dekiru.* (She can speak French.)
 she TOP- French NOM- can
 MARKER MARKER

- b. *Kare wa yakyuu ga dekiru.* (He can play baseball.)
 he TOP- baseball NOM- can
 MARKER MARKER

However, it can be claimed that these two sentences are derived from the following complex sentences 6a and 6b respectively.

- (6) a. *Kanojo wa furansugo o hanasu koto ga deki-ru.*
 she TOP- French OBJ- speak NOMINAL NOM- can-PRES
 MARKER MARKER MARKER

- b. *Kare wa yakyuu o suru koto ga deki-ru.*
 he TOP- baseball OBJ- do NOMINAL NOM- can-PRES
 MARKER MARKER MARKER

Therefore, we can mention that the Japanese potential verb *dekiru* is always used as the main verb of a complex sentence in its deep structure. The next question is, then, what

is the structure of that complex sentence is? Unlike *rare*, most linguists claim that *dekiru* is a transitive verb and possesses two NPs in a sister relationship. These two typical transitive structures are presented by Shibatani and MaCawley.

2.2.1. Shibatani's hypothesis

In Shibatani (1978), *dekiru* in Example 7 is given from the connection between *suru* (do) and *rare* (able) by applying the verb-raising transformational rule as Figure 3 shows.

- (7) *boku wa sono kai ni sanka deki-nak-atta.*
 I TOP- that meeting LOC- attend can-not -PAST
 MARKER MARKER
 (I couldn't attend that meeting.)

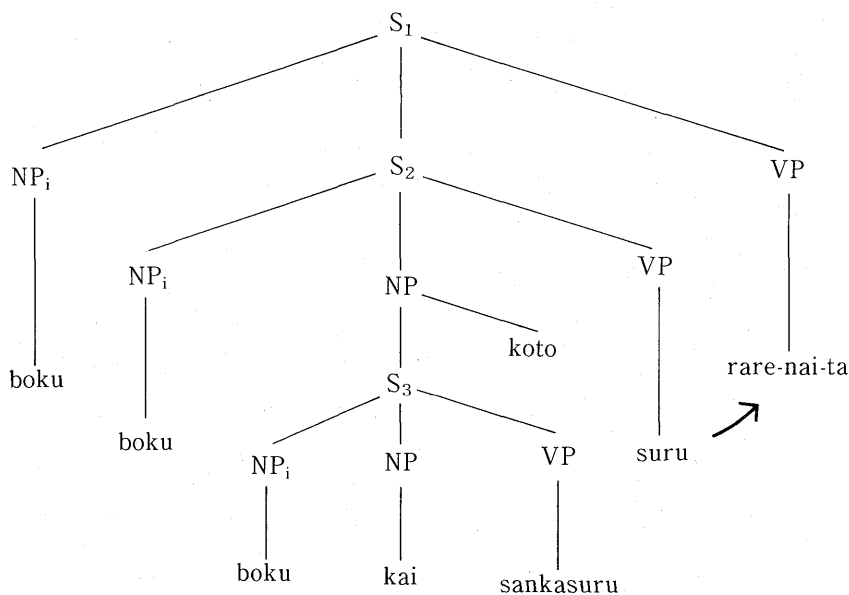


Figure 3

He also claims that *dekiru* requires a condition of like-subject constraint and so the subjects of S_1 and S_2 have to be the same. This generation can be also applied to that of a *rare*-type potential sentence. For instance, *hanaseru* (can speak) can be similarly generated from the combination of *hanasu* (speak) and *rare* (can) by the verb-raising rule in a shallow structure. Therefore, a big merit of his hypothesis is that derivation of the two

(8) a. *Taro wa yakisoba ga/o tsuku-(ra)re-ru.*

b. <i>Taro wa</i>	<i>yakisoba</i>	<i>*galo</i>	<i>tsukuru koto</i>	<i>ga</i>	<i>deki-ru.</i>
Taro TOP-MARKER	chow mein	*NOM-/OBJ-MARKER	cook	NOMINAL	NOM-MARKER can-PRES

In MaCawley (1972), the structure of sentence 9 is roughly given as in Figure 4. He also claims that *dekiru* is a two-place (transitive) verb and shows several pieces of evidence.

Taro TOP- swim NOMINAL NOM- can-PRES
MARKER MARKER

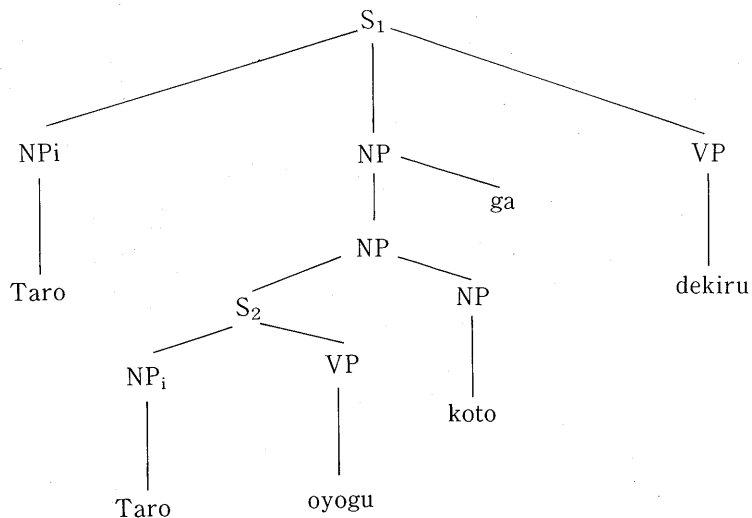


Figure 4

I will select two main examples from among his examples of evidence, and briefly explain them. One of them is concerned with the cleft-sentence formation rule.

- (10) a. *Taro wa ano kawa de oyogu koto ga deki-ru.*
 Taro TOP- that river at swim NOMINAL NOM- can-PRES
 MARKER MARKER

(Taro can swim in that river.)

- b. *Taro ga deki-ru no wa ano kawa de oyogu koto da.*
 Taro NOM- can-PRES NOMINAL TOP- that river in swim NOMINAL COPULA
 MARKER MARKER

(Lit. It is swimming in that river that Taro can do.)

- c. **Deki-ru no wa Taro ga ano kawa de oyogu koto da.*
 can -PRES NOMINAL Top- Taro NOM- that river in swim NOMINAL COPULA
 MARKER MARKER

(Lit. *It is his swimming in that river that is able.)

- (11) a. *Taro wa hayaku okiru koto ga mezurashii.*
 Taro TOP- early wake NOMINAL NOM- unusual
 MARKER MARKER

(It is unusual that he gets up early.)

- b. **Taro ga mezurashii no wa hayaku okiru koto da.*
 Taro NOM- unusual · NOMINAL TOP- early wake NOMINAL COPULA
 MARKER MARKER

(*It is getting up early that Taro is unusual.)

- c. *Mezurashii no wa Taro ga hayaku okiru koto da.*
 unusual · NOMINAL TOP- Taro NOM- early wake NOMINAL COPULA
 MARKER MARKER

(It is Taro's getting up early that is unusual.)

His argument is that; 10b is derived from 10a by applying the cleft-sentence formation rule and the grammaticality and well-formedness of 10b implies that the underlined part of 10b can be recognized a NP, and it leads to the conclusion that *dekiru* must be a two-place (transitive) verb because it is preceded by two NPs, one of which is the underlined and one of which is *Taro*, in a sister relationship. On the other hand, the structure of 11a is like Figure 5 because *mezurashii* is an intransitive predicate. Therefore, 11b is an ungrammatical sentence because the underlined part can't be qualified as a NP and can't be moved by the cleft formation. However, 11c is a good one because of correct application of a rule to the sister related NP which is underlined. If *dekiru* is an intransi-

tive verb as in Figure 6, 10c has to be a good sentence because the underlined part of 10c must be a NP and be shifted by the cleft-sentence formation. But actually it is not. This contrastive result indicates that *dekiru* must be a transitive verb.

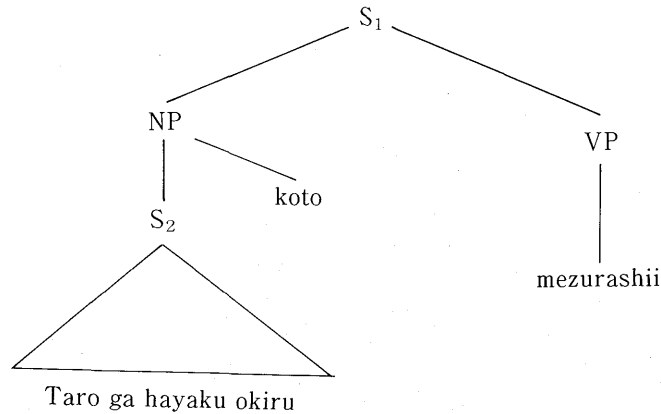


Figure 5

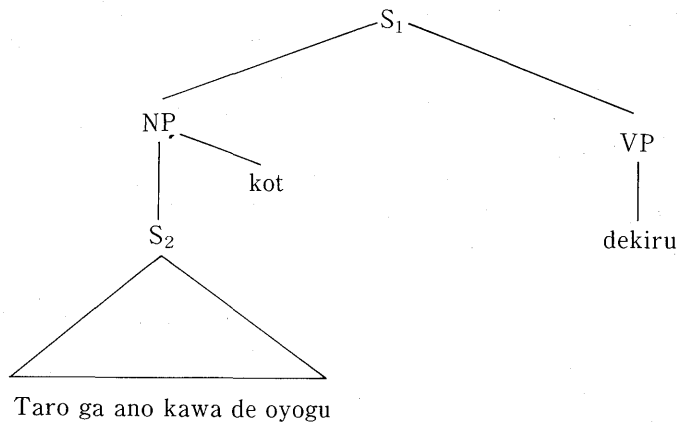


Figure 6

I'd like to claim that, first of all, his judgement to 10c and 11b is questionable. I don't think that those two sentences are perfectly acceptable, but I think they are not so awkward in my intuition. I would guess that this well-formedness comes from another condition, that is, from the like-subject constraint.

As McCawley claims, typical transitive verbs must have two NPs. For example, in

the sentence 12a, whose tree diagram is Figure 7, the verb *kirau* is transitive and so has two sister-related NPs, namely, *Taro* and *Hanako ni au koto*. *Taro* is the subject of the main verb *kirau* and also that of the verb *au* of the lower embedded clause, though *kirau* does not require a like-subject constraint. When a subject of a lower S is equal to that of a higher S, it is usually deleted by the equi-NP deletion rule.

- (12) a. *Taro wa Hanako ni au koto o kira- u.*
 Taro TOP- Hanako DAT- meet NOMNAL OBJ- hate- PRES
 MARKER MARKER MARKER

(Taro hates seeing Hanako.)

- b. *Taro ga kirau no wa Hanako ni au koto da.*
 Taro NOM- hates NOMNAL TOP- Hanako DAT- meet NOMNAL COPULA
 MARKER MARKER MARKER

(It is seeing Hanako that Taro hates.)

- c. **Kirau no wa Taro ga Hanako ni au koto da.*
 hates NOMNAL TOP- Taro NOM- Hanako DAT- meet NOMNAL COPULA
 MARKER MARKER MARKER

(*It is Taro's seeing Hanako that hates.)

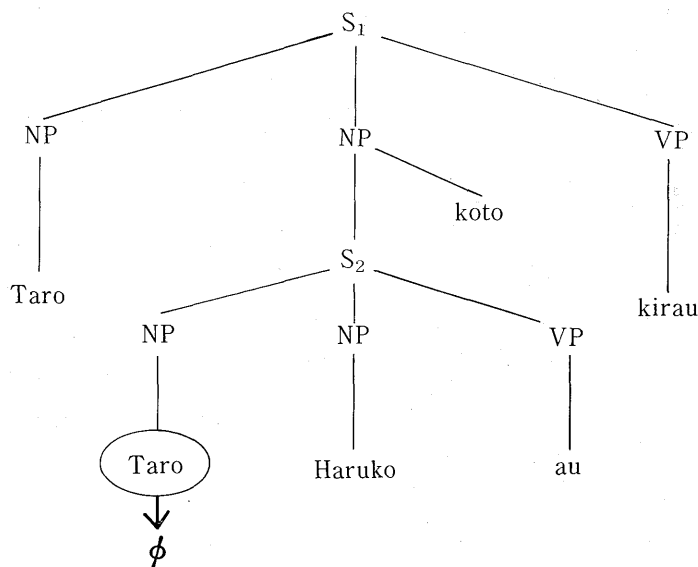


Figure 7

12b is given by clefting the second NP of 12a and is acceptable. 12c is completely out because *Taro* is included in the lower S though it is a constituent of the higher S. Even though we try to understand that *Taro* is the subject of the lower S and the subject of the higher S is deleted, 12c is still an awkward sentence. 12c can be acceptable in the only reading that *Taro* is the subject of the lower S and the subject of the higher S is "I" or "speaker" which is usually abbreviated in Japanese language. However, this is originally derived from a different sentence, not 12a.

The following example sentences in 13 and 14 consist of the transitive verbs *yakusokusuru* (promise) or *yattemiru* (try) as a main verb which has a condition of a like-subject constraint. As in Example 12, (b) and (c) sentences in 13 and 14 are derived from (a) sentences by clefting.

- (13) a. *Taro wa asu kaeru koto o yakusokushi-ta.*
 Taro TOP-MARKER tomorrow return NOMINAL OBJ-MARKER promise -PAST
 (Taro promised to come back tomorrow.)
- b. *Taro ga yakusokushi-ta koto wa asu kaeru koto*
 Taro NOM-MARKER promise -PAST NOMINAL TOP-MARKER tomorrow return NOMINAL
da -tta. (It was coming back tomorrow that Taro promised.)
 COPULA-PAST
- c. ? *yakusokushi-ta koto wa Taro ga asu kaeru koto*
 promise -PAST NOMINAL TOP-MARKER Taro NOM-MARKER tomorrow return NOMINAL
da -tta.
 COPULA-PAST
 (It was Taro's coming back tomorrow that (he) promised.)
- (14) a. *Taro wa kawa o tobikos-(rar)e-ru ka yattemi-ta.*
 Taro TOP-MARKER river OBJ-MARKER jump -can -PRES QUESTION-MARKER try -PAST
 (Taro tried to be able to jump over the river.)
- b. *Taro ga yattemi-ta no wa kawa o tobikos-(rar)e-*
 Taro NOM-MARKER try -PAST NOMINAL TOP-MARKER river OBJ-MARKER jump -can
ru ka da -tta.
 PRES QUEST-MARKER COPULA-PAST

- (16) a. *Tanaka-san wa eigo o hanasu koto ga kanou da.*
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- English OBJ- speak NOMINAL NOM- possible COPULA
 MARKER MARKER MARKER
 (It is possible that Mr. Tanaka speaks English.)
- b. *Tanaka-san ga kanouna no wa eigo o hanasu koto da.* (Lit. It is speaking English that Mr. Tanaka is capable of.)
 Tanaka-Mr. NOM- possible NOMINAL TOP- English OBJ- speak
 MARKER MARKER MARKER
 NOMINAL COPULA
- c. *kanouna no wa Tanaka-san ga eigo o hanasu koto da.*
 possible NOMINAL TOP- Tanaka-Mr. NOM- English OBJ- speak
 MARKER MARKER MARKER
 NOMINAL COPULA
 (Lit. It is Mr. Tanaka's speaking English that is possible.)

According to MaCawley's judgement, 15b and 16b should be unacceptable as is 11b. However, actually they are acceptable. How is this inconsistency explained? If the sentences 15a and 16a take an intransitive structure, we have to justify the acceptability of 15b and 16b. If they have a transitive one, we must explain the acceptability of 15c and 16c. In either case, a difficult problem remains. Therefore, I can claim that judging transitivity by using the cleft-sentence formation is open to discussion.

The second evidence is concerned with an honorification.

- (17) a. *sensei wa gunka o o -utaini-naru koto ga o -dekini-nare.*
 teacher TOP- war-song OBJ- HONORIFIC-sing -become NOMINAL NOM-
 MARKER MARKER PREFIX MARKER
 HONOR-can -become
 (Lit. Mr. Tanaka is honorifically able to honorifically sing a war song.)
- b. **sensei wa tegami o o -kakini-naru koto ga o -mezurashii.*
 teacher TOP- letter OBJ- HONOR-write -become NOMINAL NOM-
 MARKER MARKER MARKER
 HONOR-rare
 (* It is honorifically rare that Mr. Tanaka honorifically writes a letter.)

According to MaCawley's idea, the tree diagram of 17a is roughly like Figure 8. He is

arguing that in 17a both *utau* in the embedded clause and *dekiru* in the main clause can be honorified, and the abbreviated subject, that is, NP₂ *sensei* is a target of the honorification in the embedded clause and NP₁ *sensei* is also a target in the main clause. The fact that these honorifications are possible leads to the result that *dekiru* has to be a transitive verb, he insists. He also claims that, on the contrary, in 17b where the structure is Figure 9, only one NP dominating a lower S exists in the higher sentence S₁, because *mezurashii* is intransitive. This kind of NP can not be a subject for an honorified predicate. Therefore, honorification can be applied on only the level of the embedded sentence S₂, not the main sentence S₁. This is his reason why 17b is not an acceptable sentence.

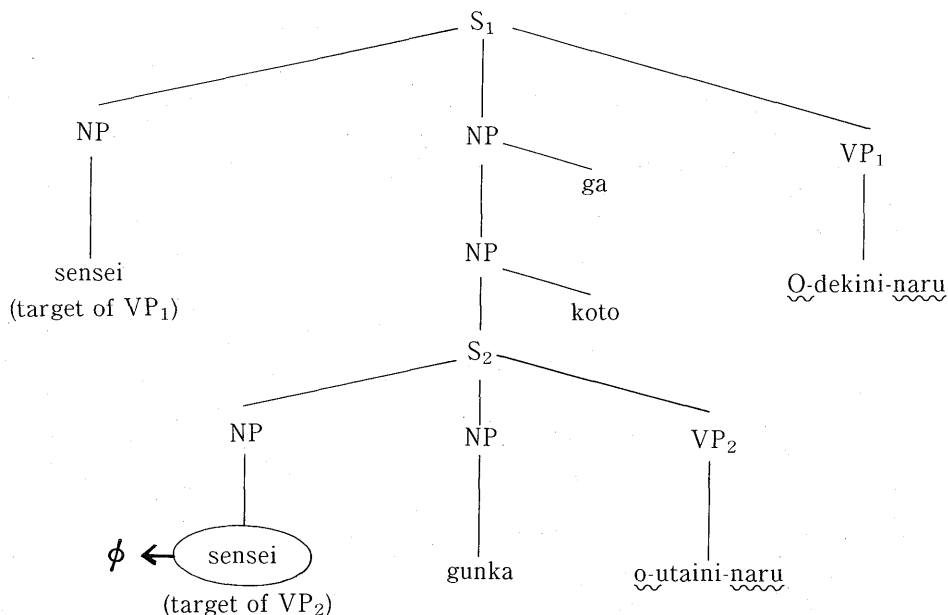


Figure 8

I will show counter-evidence to his hypothesis. Let's check the following sentences which were honorified in 2c.

- (18) a. *Tanaka-san wa eigo o o -hanashini-naru koto*
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- English OBJ- HONOR-speak -become NOMINAL
 MARKER MARKER
ga kanou da.
 NOM- can COPULA
 MARKER

(Lit. It is possible that Mr. Tanaka honorifically speaks English.)

- b. * *Tanaka-san wa eigo o o -hanashini-naru koto ga*
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- English OBJ- HONOR-speak -become NOMINAL NOM-
 MARKER MARKER MARKER
o -kanou da.
 HONOR-can COPULA
 (* It is honorifically possible that Mr. Tanaka honorifically speaks English.)

According to MaCawley's idea, *kanou* has to be intransitive because sentence 18b honorified in the level of the higher S is ungrammatical. If so, how can we explain the acceptability of 16b? That acceptable sentence is used for the justification of transitivity. This is a contradiction.

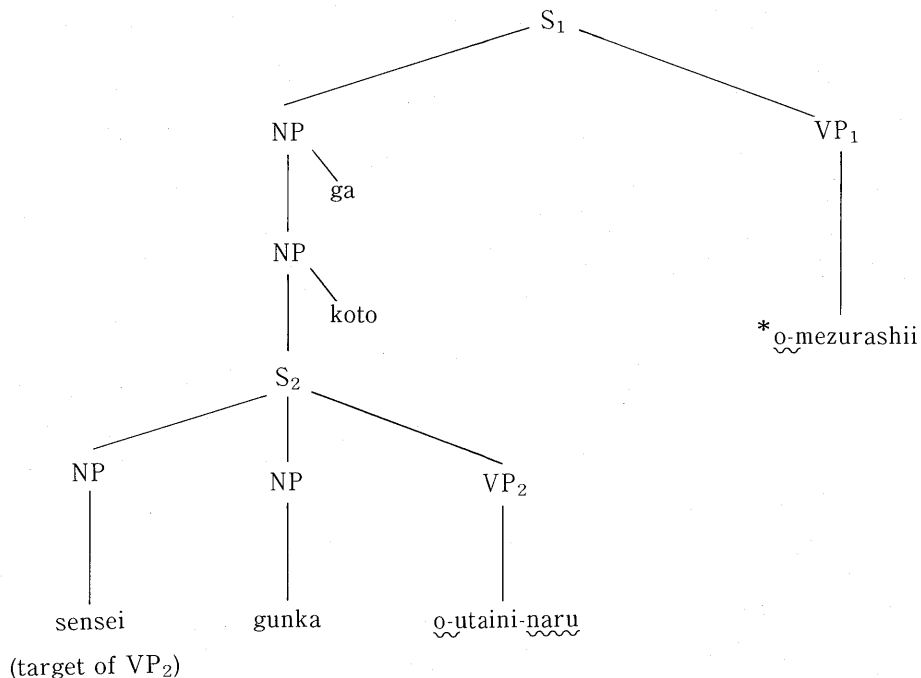


Figure 9

As we have seen, MaCawley's two main examples are not eligible to support his hypothesis that Japanese potential verb *dekiru* is a transitive verb. I am of opinion that any Japanese predicate more or less has two-sidedness, namely, transitivity and intransitivity. Typical transitive verbs are endowed with more transitivity and less intransitivity. Intransitive verbs are vice versa. I think that any predicate can be placed on the

line where extremely transitive verbs, like active verbs, are at the end of the line, and very intransitive ones, eg. passives or adjectives, are at the other end. On this continuous line, each predicate is at its own justifiable position decided by the degree of transitivity or intransitivity. Therefore, it is understood that *dekiru* performs as an intransitive verb as well as a transitive one because of the two-sidedness in its semantic function. I think I can say that dichotomous division to predicate transitivity seems to be inadequate and, for the most part, impossible.

In his paper (1989), Kunihiro expresses a similar opinion to that mentioned above. He claims that the dichotomy about verb transitivity or intransitivity does not play a role for grammar description. He also says that various flexible ideas, such as the establishment of an intermediate stage, are now required. I agree with him and I also think that a more reasonable generalization for transitivity is now expected.

3. Semantic characteristics of potential expressions

3.1. Semantic constraints on Japanese potential sentences

As I mentioned before, *rare*-type potential sentences show complex structure in either the transitive or the intransitive hypothesis. However, as *rare* is considered an "auxiliary" verb in traditional Japanese grammar, any complement of this complex structure is syntactically or semantically constrained. Tense or negation never appears in a predicate of a complement as in Exmples 19 and 20.²⁾ These constraints can be seen in all $V_1 + i + V_2$ -type predicates in which the *rare*-type potential is included, as Examples 21 and 22 show.³⁾

- (19) a. * *kai -ta -(ra)reru* (*can wrote)
 write-PAST-can
 b. *kak -(rar)e-ta* (could write)
 write-can -PAST
- (20) a. * *kaka -naku-(rar)e-ru* (*able not to write)
 write-NEG-can -PRES
 b. *kak -(rar)e-nai* (not able to write)
 write-can -NEG
- (21) a. * *kai -ta -hajimeru* (*begin wrote)
 write-PAST-begin
 b. *kaki -hajime-ta* (began to write)
 write-begin -PAST

Dekiru-type potential also shows complex structure even though it is either transitive or intransitive. This potential is preceded by a nominalizer *koto* and a nominative marker *ga*, and so the boundary between the main clause and the complement is clearer than that of *rare*-type potential sentences. This syntactic characteristic is very similar to an ordinary complex structure, but identical constraints on *rare*-type potential sentences are also seen here Examples 23 and 24.

- (23) a. **eigo o hanashi-ta koto ga deki-ru.*
 English OBJ- speak -PAST NOMINAL NOM- can-PRES
 MARKER MARKER
 (* can spoke English)

- b. *eigo o hanas-u koto ga deki-ta.*
 English OBJ- speak-PRES NOMINAL NOM- can-PAST
 MARKER MARKER
 (could speak English)

- (24) a. ?? *eigo o hanasa-nai koto ga deki-ru.*
 English OBJ- speak -NEG NOMINAL NOM- can-PRES
 MARKER MARKER
 (* be able not to speak English)

- b. *eigo o hanas-u koto ga deki-nai.*
 English OBJ- speak-PRES NOMINAL NOM- can-NEG
 MARKER MARKER
 (cannot speak English)

24a is awkward but much more acceptable than 21a. At least, syntactically it is almost acceptable. Generally speaking, *dekiru* expresses its subject's ability or potentiality in its basic semantic function. Therefore, it can be said that the semantic content of the complement has to be positive. If so, a semantically positive complement ought to be accepted even though it is syntactically taking a negative form.

- (25) ? *Tanaka-san wa mizu no nakade san-pun kan iki o shi-nai*
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- water of inside 3 -minutes for breath OBJ- do-NEG
 MARKER MARKER

koto ga deki-ru.
 NOMINAL NOM- can-PRES
 MARKER

(Lit. It is possible that Mr. Tanaka doesn't draw a breath in the water for three minutes.)

- (26) ? *Tanaka-san wa mik-ka kan nemura-nai koto ga deki-ru.*
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- 3 -days for sleep -NEG NOMINAL NOM- can-PRES
 MARKER MARKER

(Lit. It is possible that Mr. Tanaka doesn't sleep for three days.)

In my intuition, 25 and 26 are much more well-formed than 24a. I would guess that not a few native speakers might approve and actually use them.⁴⁾ If a negative element is moved up to a higher main clause, the meaning is changed as in Examples 27 and 28.

- (27) *Tanaka-san wa mizu no nakade san-pun kan iki o su-ru*
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- water of inside 3 -minutes for breath OBJ- do-PRES
 MARKER MARKER
koto ga deki-nai.
 NOMINAL NOM- can-NEG
 MARKER

(It is not possible that Mr. Tanaka draws a breath in the water for three.minutes.)

- (28) *Tanka-san wa mik-ka kan nemu-ru koto ga deki-nai.*
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- 3 -days for sleep-PRES NOMINAL NOM- can-NEG
 MARKER MARKER

(It is not possible that Mr. Tanaka sleeps for three days.)

27 and 28 are perfectly acceptable but semantically different from 25 and 26 respectively, as I mentioned above. In my intuition, 25 means that Mr. Tanaka has the ability to stop his breathing in the water for three minutes, but, 27 implies that Mr. Tanaka can not breathe in the water for three minutes. The semantic representations are different from each other. This means that the negative raising rule can not be applied to *dekiru*-type potential sentences.

As the result, I can conclude that *dekiru* is a factive verb and has a semantic feature [+positive].

On the other hand, unlike *dekiru*, *kanou*-type potential sentences do not have a positivity constraint on its complement as in Examples 29, 30, and 31.

- (29) *Tanaka-san wa eigo o hanasa-nai koto ga kanou da.*
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- English OBJ- speak -NEG NOMINAL NOM- possible COPULA
 MARKER MARKER MARKER

(It is possible that Mr. Tanaka doesn't speak English.)

- (30) *Tanaka-san wa mizu no nakade san-pun kan iki o shi-nai*
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- water of inside 3 -minutes for breath OBJ- do-NEG
 MARKER MARKER

koto ga kanou da.
 NOMINAL NOM- possible COPULA
 MARKER

(It is possible that Mr. Tanaka doesn't draw a breath in water for 3 minutes.)

- (31) *Tanaka-san wa mik-ka kan nemura-nai koto ga kanou da.*
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- 3 -days for sleep -NEG NOMINAL NOM- possible COPULA
 MARKER MARKER

(It is possible that Mr. Tanaka doesn't sleep for three days.)

I can say that *kanou-da* has factivity because sentences 32, 33, and 34 derived by the neg-raising rule are semantically different from their originals, respectively 29, 30, and 31. For instance, 30 implies that Mr. Tanaka can stop his breathing for three minutes, but the representation of 33 is that Mr. Tanaka is prevented from breathing in the water for three minutes.

- (32) *Tanaka-san wa eigo o hanas-u koto ga kanoudewa-nai.*
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- English OBJ- speak-PRES NOMINAL NOM- possible -NEG
 MARKER MARKER MARKER

(It is not possible that Mr. Tanaka speaks English.)

- (33) *Tanaka-san wa mizu no nakade san-pun kan iki o su-ru*
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- water of inside 3 -minutes for breath OBJ- do-PRES
 MARKER MARKER
koto ga kanoudewa -nai.
 NOMINAL NOM- possible -NEG
 MARKER

(It is not possible that Mr. Tanaka draws a breath in water for 3 minutes.)

- (34) *Tanaka-san wa mik-ka kan nemu-ru koto ga kanoudewa-nai.*
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- 3 -days for sleep -PRES NOMINAL NOM- possible -NEG
 MARKER MARKER

(It is not possible that Mr. Tanaka sleeps for three days.)

It may be given as a conclusion that *kanou* does not have the semantic feature [+positive], and it is neutral, and that, like *dekiru*, *kanou* is also a factive predicate and so the negative raising rule can not be applied.

3.2. Semantic differences between Japanese potentials

In Kuno (1983), he points out a semantic difference between *rare*-type potential expressions and *dekiru*-type potential expressions. He claims that *rare* expresses its subject's internal potentiality and *dekiru* indicates a potentiality which originates from an external

condition and gives the following examples.

- (35) a. *shibafu ni hai -(ra)re-nai.* (can not enter the lawn)

lawn LOC-
MARKER enter-can -NEG

- b. *shibafu ni hai -ru koto ga deki-nai.*

lawn LOC-
MARKER enter-PRES NOMINAL NOM-
MARKER can -NEG

(not able to enter the lawn)

He insists that a subject can't enter the lawn for his or her own sake in 35a, but in 35b he or she is kept from entering there by an external obstruction. In addition, he claims that 36b is better than 36a in the following because we can clearly see that an external condition is concerned.

- (36) a. *Kaiin wa kaihi o nen san-kai ni wakete hara-(rar)e-ru.*

member TOP- fee OBJ- year 3 -times in divide pay -can -PRES
MARKER MARKER

(A member can pay an annual membership fee in three-time installments.)

- b. *kaiin wa kaihi o nen san-kai ni wakete harau koto ga*

member TOP- fee OBJ- year 3 -times in divide pay NOMINAL NOM-
MARKER MARKER MARKER

deki-ru.

can -PRES

I have a question about the semantic difference that he gives in 35. If his claim is correct, when I add a phrase which expresses an external obstruction to the sentences in 35, 35a has to show incongruity in its semantic implication.

- (37) a. *mihari ga iru node shibafu ni hai -(ra)re-nai.*

watchman NOM- exist because lawn LOC- enter-can -NEG
MARKER MARKER

(I can't enter the lawn because a watchman is there.)

- b. *mihari ga iru node shibafu ni hai -ru koto ga*

watchman NOM- exist because lawn LOC- enter-PRES NOMINAL NOM-
MARKER MARKER MARKER

deki-nai.

can-NEG

No incongruity occurs in my intuition. I agree that 36b is better than 36a as he says. I

think, however, this comes from a stylistic selection. 36 is a kind of social regulation. This kind of sentence is somewhat formal, and so more literal expressions are preferred. I would guess that this stylistic preference requires *dekiru* rather than *rate*. Consequently, it can be said that *dekiru* and *rate* are syntactically much different from each other, but are semantically similar except in their style.

3.3. Negation in English potential expressions

It is a quite difficult problem whether potential sentences whose predicates consist of “can + verb” are complex or not. It is not solved yet. However, a so-called “auxiliary” verb *can* assumes the responsibilities of tense and negativity as *rare* does in Japanese. However, there is a special negative formation in English as shown in 39b.

(39) a. *He can not go anywhere next week.*

b. *He can go nowhere next week.*

I can't compare 39b with the Japanese version because we do not have such a negative pattern in Japanese. If 39a and 39b are semantically the same and a *can-type* potential takes a complement, it might be said that *can* admits a negative in its complement as *kanou*, or partially *dekiru* does.

On the contrary, an *able-type* potential cannot co-occur with this special negative form.

(40) a. *He is able to go somewhere next week.*

b. *He is not able to go anywhere next week.*

c. ??? *He is able to go nowhere next week.*

40c is almost impossible for native speakers to accept. This implies that *able* possesses a semantic feature [+positive] which is the same as *dekiru* and avoids a negative form in its complement. In addition to this, *able* also indicates an interesting tendency. That is to say, like *dekiru*, *able* admits a syntactically negative complement unless its semantic connotation is negative as in 41b. However, 41b is not derived from 41a because each sentence is semantically different.

(41) a. *He is not able to draw a breath in the water for three minutes.*

b. ? *He is able to draw no breath in the water for three minutes.*

It is also interesting that, I dare say, these semantic characteristics of *able* are almost parallel to those of the Japanese potential *dekiru*.

Another parallel is between a *possible-type* potential and a *konou-type* one.

(42) a. *It is not possible that he will go somewhere next week.*

b. *It is possible that he won't go anywhere next week.*

c. *It is possible that he will go nowhere next week.*

My informants judge that all of these three sentences are acceptable but 42a is semantically different from 41b and 41c though 41b and 41c are identical. We can notice that this tendency is quite similar to that of *kanou* except 41c because the Japanese language does not have such a negative pattern. In 41a, the subject's willingness to be going somewhere is implied; however, in 41b and 42c he doesn't want to go, but to stay. Therefore, I can say that *possible* blocks the application of the negative raising rule and is syntactically and semantically neutral on the positivity of the complement.

4. Conclusions

It is difficult to decide whether the Japanese potential verb *dekiru* is transitive or intransitive, because the hypotheses I have investigated are still open to discussion. I'd like to suggest that we should take it into consideration that we set up an intermediate stage from the viewpoint of the continuity of transitivity since a dichotomous judgement is not effective to this problem.

In addition, *dekiru* and *able* possess a semantic feature [+positive] and this feature gives semantic constraints to their complements. On the other hand, *kanou* and *possible* do not have such constraints. Roughly speaking, Japanese *rare* is parallel to English *can*, *dekiru* to *able*, and *kanou* to *possible*. Syntactic structures of a *rare*-type potential and a *can*-type one are still obscure and another potential expressions, eg. *to be capable of*, are not mentioned here. I'd like to investigate these problems next time.

Notes

- 1) For instance, *tabe* (to eat)-*rare-ru* can be understood "to be able to eat", "to be eaten", or "to eat honorifically."
- 2) If *rare*-type potential structure is complex, it follows that a negative raising rule is obligatorily applied.
- 3) For example, *kaki-owaru* (finish writing), *kaki-tsuzukeru* (continue writing), and *kaki-sugiru* (to write too much). These underlined terms are called "aspect verbs" in Japanese linguistics.
- 4) It may be seen that a positive-form complement is preferred in actual communication as in the following examples.

<i>Tanaka-san wa</i>	<i>mizu no nakade</i>	<i>san-pun</i>	<i>kan iki</i>	<i>o</i>	<i>to meru</i>
Tanaka-Mr. TOP-	water of inside	3 -minutes	for	breath	OBJ-
MARKER					stop
					MARKER
<i>koto</i>	<i>ga</i>	<i>deki-ru.</i>			
NOMINAL	NOM-	can-PRES			
	MARKER				

(Mr. Tanaka can stop breathing in the water for three minutes.)

Tanaka-san wa mik-ka kan okiteiru koto ga deki-ru.
 Tanaka-Mr. TOP- 3 -days for wake NOMINAL NOM- can-PRES
 MARKER MARKER

(Mr. Tanaka can wake for three days.)

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