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# Reduplicated Verbs in Japanese as Grammatical Constructions

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## Introduction<sup>0</sup>

There are a number of syntactic formulas in Japanese which require reduplication of a verb, adjective, or noun. In this paper, I will consider two verbal reduplicative constructions: *Verb-(i)ni Verb* and *Verbal koto wa Verbal* (the verbal here may be a verb or an adjective).<sup>1</sup> (Hereafter, I will refer to *Verb-(i)ni Verb* as the *ni* construction and to *Verbal koto wa Verbal* as the *koto wa* construction.) I will demonstrate that each of these constructions exhibits syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic idiosyncrasies that cannot be accounted for by a modular grammar which separates semantics and pragmatics from syntax. I will further argue that although these constructions cannot be generated by standard modular grammar, they cannot be treated as genuine idioms or compound verbs because of certain properties they bear. I will conclude that these constructions are best described as 'grammatical constructions', as characterized by Fillmore and others (Fillmore, Kay, and O'Connor 1988, Fillmore 1985, Lambrecht 1984).

## Semantic Properties

Semantically, both the *ni* construction and the *koto wa* construction are non-compositional, hence they cannot be analyzed according to regular semantic interpretation principles. Literally, or according to compositional semantics, *Verb-(i)ni Verb* means '(in order) to Verb, Verb'. (Here, I interpret the *Verb-ni* as a purpose phrase, as it is typically used, as in sentence (1).) Thus, for example, *tabe-ni tabeta* literally means '(in order) to eat, ate'. However, *Verb-(i)ni Verb*, as a whole, means 'Verb to an extreme extent'. Thus, *tabe-ni tabeta* means 'ate to an extreme extent', as in sentence (2). Sentence (3) is another example of this construction. (TM = topic marker; OM = object marker)

- (1) Taroo wa tosyokan e hon o kari-ni it-ta.  
TM library to book OM borrow to go Past  
'Taroo went to the library to borrow a book.'
- (2) Kinoo wa susi o tabe-ni tabe-ta.  
yesterday TM sushi OM eat eat Past  
'Yesterday (I) ate sushi to an extreme extent.'
- (3) Hanako wa Yosio o nikum-ini nikun-da.  
TM OM hate hate Past  
'Hanako hated Yoshio to an extreme extent.'

As for the expression *Verbal koto wa Verbal*, on the other hand, compositional semantics yields its literal meaning as 'That . . . Verbal, Verbal'. For example, *oisii koto wa oisii* literally means 'That (something) is tasty, is tasty', which does not make much sense. However, *Verbal koto wa Verbal*, as a whole, has its own meaning: Although it is difficult to translate into English, it roughly means 'It is true/I admit that . . . Verbal'. Thus, *oisii koto wa oisii*, as a whole, means 'It is true/I admit that (something) is tasty', as in sentence (4). Sentence (5) is another example.

- (4) Ano okasi wa oisii koto wa oisii.  
that cake TM tasty tasty  
'It is true that that cake is tasty.'

- (5) Sakubun o kai-ta koto wa kai-ta.  
 composition OM write Past write-Past  
 'It is true that (I) wrote a composition.'

These facts suggest that both *Verb-(i)ni Verb* and *Verbal koto wa Verbal* are like words in that each construction, as a whole, has a specific meaning.

### Morpho-syntactic Properties

The two constructions also exhibit morpho-syntactic (and phonological) idiosyncrasies. In the following I will first discuss the properties of the *ni* construction, and then those of the *koto wa* construction.

Some properties of the *ni* construction suggest that it cannot be analyzed as a complex phrasal expression generated by standard phrase structure rules--i.e. as consisting of two independent phrases, the *Verb ni* and the *Verb*, and that it is rather an integral whole like a compound verb. The following five properties will demonstrate this point.

First, the phrase *Verb-(i)ni* is usually interpreted as a purpose expression and followed by a verb of motion, such as *iku* 'go' and *kaeru* 'return', as shown in sentence (1). Standard phrase structure rules do not include a construction in which the phrase *Verb-(i)ni* is followed by the same verb as in the *ni* construction.

Second, as I pointed out above, it is semantically like a single word and resists a componential analysis, hence a regular categorial syntactic analysis.

Third, the *ni* construction does not allow intrusion by an adverbial or a noun phrase, as shown in (6b) and (7b). If we replace the *Verb-(i)ni* in the *ni* construction with a regular manner-adverbial like *omoikkiri* 'as much as one wishes' or *sinsoko kara* 'from the bottom of one's heart', other elements can be placed between the adverbial and the verb, as shown in (6c) and (7c). Thus, if we can regard the *Verb-(i)ni* in the *ni* construction as a regular adverbial phrase, intrusions, as in (6b) and (7b), should be possible.

- (6) a. Kinoo wa Yamada to akegata made nom-ini non-da.  
 yesterday TM with dawn until drink drink-Past  
 'Yesterday, (I) drank to an extreme extent with Yamada until dawn.'
- b. \*Kinoo wa Yamada to nom-ini akegata made non-da.  
 yesterday TM with drink dawn until drink Past  
 'Yesterday, (I) drank to an extreme extent with Yamada until dawn.'
- c. Kinoo wa Yamada to omoikkiri akegata made non-da.  
 yesterday TM with as much as we wish dawn until drink Past  
 'Yesterday, (I) drank with Yamada, as much as (we) wished, until dawn.'
- (7) a. Hanako wa Yosio o nikum-ini nikun-da.  
 TM OM hate hate Past  
 'Hanako hated Yoshio to an extreme extent.'
- b. \*Hanako wa nikum-ini Yosio o nikun-da.  
 TM hate OM hate Past  
 'Hanako hated Yoshio to an extreme extent.'
- c. Hanako wa sinsoko kara Yosio o nikun-da.  
 TM from the bottom of the heart OM hate Past  
 'Hanako hated Yoshio from the bottom of (her) heart.'

Fourth, the causative form *-(s)ase* applies to the *ni* construction as a whole (e.g. (8a)); it becomes less acceptable if the causative form is applied separately to each instance of the verb (e.g. (8b)).

(8) a. Kooti wa Taroo o hasir-ini hasir-ase-ta.  
 coach TM OM run run Caus Past  
 'The coach made Taroo run to an extreme extent.'

b. ??Kooti wa Taroo o hasir-ase-ni hasir-ase-ta.  
 coach TM OM run Caus run Caus Past  
 'The coach made Taroo run to an extreme extent.'

Fifth, as can be seen in the above examples, tense is marked for the *ni* construction as a whole, and not for each instance of the verb.

The properties listed above may suggest that instances of the *ni* construction be regarded as compound verbs. However, there are also properties that indicate that such a treatment is not appropriate. The following five points will show that the *ni* construction differs from a prototypical compound verb.

First, *Verb-(i)ni Verb* does not have the pitch pattern characteristic of a compound verb: The latter has one accentual peak, as shown in (9a), whereas the former has two accentual peaks--i.e. one peak in each verb, as shown in (9b).

(9) a. oti-tuk-u  
 fall arrive  
 'calm/settle down'

b. nom-ini nom-u  
 drink drink  
 'drink to an extreme extent'

Second, the *ni* construction contains a particle (i.e. *-(i)ni*) which is not found in regular compound verbs. (See examples (9a) and (9b).)

Third, unlike regular compound verbs, the *ni* construction rejects the so-called subject honorific form *o(-Verb)-(i)ni nar(u)*. For example, in (10a), this honorific is appropriately used for the compound verb *kaki-ageru* 'finish writing', whereas in (10b), which contains the *ni* construction, the use of the same honorific is not acceptable.

(10) a. Sensei wa hon o q-kak-i-age -ni nat-ta.  
 teacher TM book OM write finish HN Past  
 'The teacher finished writing the book.'

b. \*Sensei wa o-sake o q-nom-ini nom -ini nat-ta.  
 teacher TM sake OM drink drink HN Past  
 'The teacher drank sake to an extreme extent.'

Fourth, compound verbs and the *ni* construction behave differently with respect to the passive form *-(r)are*. In the case of compound verbs, the passive form applies to a compound as a whole (e.g. (11a)), but not to each verb in the compound (e.g. (11b)). In the *ni* construction, the passive form can be applied to the construction as a whole (e.g. (12a)). But it can also be applied separately to each instance of the verb (e.g. (12b)).<sup>2</sup>

- (11) a. Taroo wa Hanako ni tob-i-tuk -are-ta.  
 TM by jump stick Pass Past  
 'Taroo was jumped at by Hanako.'
- b. \*Taroo wa Hanako ni tob-are tuk-are-ta  
 TM by jump Pass stick Pass Past  
 'Taroo was jumped at by Hanako.'
- (12) a. Yamada wa sono kaigi de tatak-ini tatak-are-ta.  
 TM that meeting in attack attack Pass Past  
 'Yamada was attacked/criticized in that meeting to an extreme extent.'
- b. Yamada wa sono kaigi de tatak-are-ni tatak-are-ta.  
 TM that meeting in attack Pass attack Pass Past  
 'Yamada was attacked/criticized in that meeting to an extreme extent.'

Fifth, unlike lexical compound verbs,<sup>3</sup> the *ni* construction is used productively, although there are certain constraints for its application.<sup>4</sup>

I will now discuss the properties of the *koto wa* construction. Like the *ni* construction, the *koto wa* construction has properties which indicate that it is syntactically an integral whole. The following three properties support this point.

First, as I mentioned earlier, *Verbal koto wa Verbal* is semantically like a single word and resists a componential analysis, and hence a regular categorial syntactic analysis.

Second, and related to the first property, the *koto wa* construction cannot be generated by standard phrase structure rules. Normally, the word *koto* is used as a complementizer which nominalizes the preceding clause, and the particle *wa* marks this nominalized clause as the topic. What follows the *koto wa* is the comment. This is not the case in the *koto wa* construction. For example, in (13) and (14), the whole clause preceding the *koto* is the topic and what follows the *koto wa* is the comment; at the same time, in (13), the clause preceding the *koto wa* is the subject of the adjectival expression *tasika da* 'is certain', and in (14), it is the object of the verb *mitomeru* 'admit'. Thus, in sentences, such as (13) and (14), there is a major syntactic (as well as semantic and pragmatic) break after the *koto wa*. (SM = subject marker; CP = complementizer)

- (13) Taroo ga ano tegami o kai-ta koto wa tasika-da.  
 SM that letter OM write Past CP TM certain Pres  
 'It is certain that Taroo wrote that letter.'
- (14) Ano tegami o kai-ta koto wa mitomer-u.  
 that letter OM write Past CP TM admit Pres  
 '(I) admit that (I) wrote that letter.'
- (15) Boku wa soko e it-ta koto wa it-ta.  
 I TM there to go Past go Past  
 'It is true that I went there.'

In the *koto wa* construction, on the other hand, the 'clause' preceding the *koto wa* is not the topic of the sentence. The topic of the sentence, if any, is the noun phrase marked by the particle *wa*; and the *Verbal koto wa Verbal*, as a whole, functions like a main verbal. For example, in sentence (15), the expression preceding the *koto*, namely, *boku wa soko e itta* 'I went there' is not the topic clause because the *itta* after the *koto wa* cannot be considered the comment of this clause, and also because the *boku* in (15) is followed by the topic marker *wa*.<sup>5</sup> (In (13), on the contrary, the *Taroo* is part of the

clause nominalized by the *koto*, hence it cannot be marked by *wa*.) Thus, in (15), *boku* is the topic as well as the subject, and the *itta koto wa itta* is the main verbal. There is no major break after the *koto wa* in (15), as in the case of (14).

Third, the *koto wa* construction generally rejects intrusion by a manner/time/place adverbial or by a noun phrase, as in sentence (16b). Accordingly, we cannot identify the Verbal *koto wa* with a regular adverbial phrase, such as *hontoo ni* 'indeed', which allows other element to follow it before the final verb, as in (16c). It should be noted, however, that the *koto wa* construction allows intrusion by a few modal adverbials, such as *tasika ni* 'certainly' and *hontoo ni* 'indeed/truly', as shown in sentence (16d).

- (16) a. Kinoo ame ga fut-ta koto wa fut-ta.  
 yesterday rain SM fall Past fall Past  
 'It is true that it rained yesterday.'
- b. \*Ame ga fut-ta koto wa kinoo fut-ta.  
 rain SM fall Past yesterday fall Past  
 'It is true that it rained yesterday.'
- c. Ame ga hontoo ni kinoo fut-ta.  
 rain SM indeed yesterday fall Past  
 'It indeed rained yesterday.'
- d. Kinoo ame ga fut-ta koto wa tasika ni fut-ta.  
 yesterday rain SM fall Past certainly fall Past  
 'It is certainly true that it rained yesterday.'

The properties listed above suggest that the *koto wa* construction has word-like properties. However, as in the case of the *ni* construction, the *koto wa* construction cannot be regarded as a compound verb for the following seven reasons.

First, the pitch pattern of the *koto wa* construction differs from that of a compound verb: The former has three accentual peaks, while the latter has only one.

Second, unlike compound verbs, the *koto wa* construction contains the complementizer *koto* and the particle *wa*.

Third, the so-called subject honorific form *o(-Verb)-ni naru* cannot be applied to the *koto wa* construction as a whole (e.g. (17a)), but it must be applied separately to each instance of the verb (e.g. (17b)). The opposite is the case in compound verbs.

- (17) a. \*Sensei wa tegami o o-yon-da koto wa yom-ini nat-ta.  
 teacher TM letter OM read Past read HN Past  
 'It is true that the teacher read the letter.'
- b. Sensei wa tegami o o-yom-ini nat-ta koto wa o-yom-ini nat-ta.  
 teacher TM letter OM read HN Past read HN Past  
 'It is true that the teacher read the letter.'

Fourth, contrary to the case of compound verbs (e.g. (11a, b)), the passive form *-(r)are* must be applied separately to each instance of the verb in the *koto wa* construction, as shown in (18b), and not to the construction as a whole, as in (18a).

- (18) a. \*Boku wa Taroo ni nagut-ta koto wa nagur-are-ta.  
 I TM by hit Past hit Pass Past  
 'It is true that I was hit by Taroo.'

- b. Boku wa Taroo ni nagur-are-ta koto wa nagur-are-ta.  
 I TM by hit Pass Past hit Pass Past  
 'It is true that I was hit by Taroo.'

Fifth, unlike compound verbs (e.g. (19)), in the *koto wa* construction the causative form *-(s)ase* must be applied separately to each instance of the verb, as shown in (20a) and (20b).

- (19) Taroo wa Hanako o oti-tuk -ase-ta.  
 TM OM calm down Caus Past  
 'Taroo made Hanako calm down.'
- (20) a. \*Taroo ni kusuri o non-da koto wa nom-ase-ta.  
 OM medicine OM take Past take Caus Past  
 'It is true that (I) had Taroo take the medicine.'
- b. Taroo ni kusuri o nom-ase-ta koto wa nom-ase-ta.  
 OM medicine OM take Caus Past take Caus Past  
 'It is true that (I) had Taroo take the medicine.'

Sixth, unlike compound verbs, each verb in the *koto wa* construction is marked by tense. And, last, the *koto wa* construction is used fully productively.

To summarize the morpho-syntactic (and phonological) properties of the two constructions examined above: Both constructions possess word-like properties as well as complex phrasal properties; neither construction can be regarded as a prototypical compound verb nor a complex phrasal expression generated by standard phrase structure rules. It should be noted, however, that the two constructions are not exactly the same with respect to the degree of their 'word-likeness'. As the analysis above indicates, the *ni* construction is more word-like than the *koto wa* construction.

### Semantic and Pragmatic Functions

In what remains, I will discuss the semantic and pragmatic functions of the two constructions. As the examples given above suggest, the *ni* construction involves primarily the propositional content of a sentence whereas the *koto wa* construction concerns both the propositional content and the modality.

With regard to *Verb-(i)ni Verb*, at the level of propositional content, the construction, as a whole, satisfies simultaneously the function of a verb and that of a manner-adverbial: that is, it refers to a certain action/process as well as to the manner in which the action/process is carried out.

The function of the *koto wa* construction, on the other hand, concerns both the proposition and the modality in that the construction, as a whole, refers to a certain action/process/state as well as to the speaker's attitude toward the propositional content. Through the *koto wa* construction the speaker expresses his/her concessive attitude toward the proposition in question. Accordingly, it is typically (but not always) used parenthetically as a concessive preface to the main assertion, which points out a value contrary to the value stated in the preface. For example, in sentence (21), the first clause which contains the *koto wa* construction is the preface to the second clause (i.e. *yoku-nai* 'not good')--the main assertion. Sentence (22B) can be analyzed in the same manner.

- (21) Sakubun o kai-ta koto wa kai-ta ga, yoku-nai.  
 composition OM write Past write Past but good Neg  
 'It is true that (I) wrote a composition, but (it) is not good.'

(22) A: Kono okasi oisii ne.  
this cake tasty  
'This cake is tasty, isn't it?'

B: Un, oisii koto wa oisii kedo, takai yo.  
yes tasty tasty but expensive  
'Yes, it's true that (it)'s tasty, but (it)'s expensive.'

In both sentences (21) and (22B), the preface expresses some positive value regarding the subject matter, whereas the main assertion expresses some negative value. This, however, is not always the case; the reverse is also possible. Sentences (23) and (24B) show that the preface containing the *koto wa* construction expresses a negative value, whereas the main assertion conveys a positive value.

(23) Ano okasi wa takai koto wa takai kedo, oisii.  
that cake TM expensive expensive but tasty  
'It is true that that cake is expensive, but (it)'s tasty.'

(24) A: Kono uti, honto ni semai n da.  
this house really small  
'This house is really small.'

B: Semai koto wa semai ga, totemo kinoo-teki-da ne.  
small small but very functional Pres  
'It is true that (it)'s small, but (it) is very functional.'

In either case, the proposition in the preface is often something that has been (explicitly or implicitly) asserted or questioned in the preceding discourse (e.g. (22) (24)).<sup>6</sup> And the preface containing the *koto wa* construction functions as kind of a concessive echo statement. The speaker, by repeating the proposition, indicates that s/he accepts concessively its validity. But, then the main assertion follows, which reveals that the speaker believes some contrary value to be also applicable.

Compare now sentences (22B) and (25Bi) which differ from each other only in the conjunctions: *kedo* 'but' in (22B) and *kara* 'so/therefore' in (25Bi).

(25) A: Kono okasi oisii ne.  
this cake tasty  
'This cake is tasty, isn't it?'

Bi: \*Un, oisii koto wa oisii kara, takai yo.  
yes tasty tasty so expensive  
'Yes, it's true that (it)'s tasty, so (it)'s expensive.'

Bii: Un, oisii kara takai n da yo.  
yes tasty so expensive  
'Yes, (it) is tasty, so (it)'s expensive.'

In (22B), the *koto wa* construction and the conjunction *kedo* are appropriately used: B, the speaker, first agrees with A's opinion concessively, and then asserts his/her own opinion, which points out some value perceived as contrary to the value indicated in A's opinion. In (25B), on the other hand, the use of *kara* indicates that the speaker perceives the first proposition, or A's assertion, as the reason that can justify the second proposition, his own assertion. In other words, A's assertion is treated as compatible with B's own assertion. Accordingly, there is no need for B to concede A's opinion, hence the use of

the *koto wa* construction in (25Bi) is inappropriate. Sentence (25Bii), on the other hand, is acceptable, because the *koto wa* construction is not used.

(26) A: Kono okasi takai ne.  
           this cake expensive  
           'This cake is expensive, isn't it?'

B: Un, demo oisii koto wa oisii kara, takai n da yo.  
           yes but           tasty           tasty so expensive  
           'Yes, but it's true that (it)'s tasty, so (it)'s expensive.'

(27) A: Kono okasi oisii ne.  
           this cake tasty  
           'This cake is tasty, isn't it?'

Bi: \*Un, demo takai koto wa takai kara, oisii n da yo.  
           yes but expensive           expensive so tasty  
           'Yes, but it's true that (it)'s expensive, so (it)'s tasty.'

Bii: Un, takai kara oisii n da yo.  
           yes expensive so tasty  
           'Yes, (it)'s expensive, so (it)'s tasty.'

Note, however, that there are cases in which the *koto wa* construction can cooccur with the conjunction *kara*.<sup>7</sup> For example, in (26B) the second proposition is the same as A's opinion, which points out a negative value of the subject matter (i.e. the cake). The first proposition in (26B) can be regarded as a positive aspect of the same subject matter which is recognized by people in general. The speaker of (26B) justifies the negative value in question by concessively admitting the positive value in the first proposition as the reason for the negative value. Thus, the use of the *koto wa* construction with the conjunction *kara* is appropriate in (26B).

Compared to (26B), (27Bi) is odd: In (27Bi), the second proposition, which is the same as A's opinion, is a positive aspect of the subject matter, while the first proposition, which is used as the reason for the second proposition, is a negative aspect. There is no need for B, the speaker, to be concessive about the negative aspect in order to justify the positive aspect. Thus, the use of the *koto wa* construction is inappropriate. Sentence (27Bii), on the other hand, is acceptable as a response to (27A) because the *koto wa* construction is not used.

### Conclusion

I have pointed out various morpho-syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic idiosyncrasies of the *ni* construction and the *koto wa* construction. These idiosyncrasies make the two constructions idiomatic. Yet, they cannot be treated as genuine idioms because they are used productively: their members are not exhaustively listable in the lexicon. Like many other syntactic formulas (Lambrecht 1984, Fillmore *et al.* 1988), the properties of these two constructions support the view of language that productivity and idiomaticity are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It is also the case that these constructions cannot be fully described by a modular grammar which separates semantics, pragmatics, and lexicon from syntactic rules. I argue that these constructions, along with other reduplicative constructions in Japanese (e.g., *V-temo V-temo*, *N wa N to site*), are best accounted for by a non-modular construction grammar--i.e. as partially lexicalized integral morpho-syntactic patterns bearing unique semantic and pragmatic properties.

## Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup>The use of the terms 'verb' and 'verbal' here is at issue. I use the term 'verb' (in the *ni* construction) to refer to the stem form of a verb, and the term 'verbal' (in the *koto wa* construction) to refer to the verb or adjective stem form plus tense.

<sup>2</sup>As the following examples indicate, the acceptability of the passive form *-(r)are* in the *ni* construction seems to differ depending on the verb.

- (i) a. ??Boku wa sensei ni sikar-ini sikar-are-ta.  
I TM teacher by scold scold Pass Past  
'I was scolded by (my) teacher to an extreme extent.'  
b. Boku wa sensei ni sikar-are-ni sikar-are-ta.  
I TM teacher by scold Pass scold Pass Past  
'I was scolded by (my) teacher to an extreme extent.'
- (ii) a. Boku wa sensei ni home-ni home-rare-ta.  
I TM teacher by praise praise Pass Past  
'I was praised by (my) teacher to an extreme extent.'  
b. ?Boku wa sensei ni home-rare-ni home-rare-ta.  
I TM teacher by praise Pass praise Pass Past  
'I was praised by (my) teacher to an extreme extent.'

<sup>3</sup>Note that there are so-called syntactically formed, or productive, compound verbs. These compounds are semantically transparent: The second members in these compounds usually express aspectual meanings, and are close to auxiliary verbs (e.g. *tabe-owaru* 'finish eating', *tabe-hazimeru* 'start eating').

<sup>4</sup>For example, the *ni* construction rejects nondurative verbs, such as *tuku* 'arrive' and *tomaru* 'stop' (e.g., (i)); nor does it allow compound verbs containing the verb *suru* 'do' (e.g. (ii)).

- (i) \*Boku-tati wa tyoozyoo ni tuk-ini tui-ta.  
we TM summit reach reach Past  
'We reached the summit to an extreme extent.'  
(ii) \*Kinoo wa kaimono-si-ni kaimono-si-ta.  
yesterday TM shopping-do shopping-do-Past  
'Yesterday, (I) did shopping to an extreme extent.'

<sup>5</sup>As will be discussed later in this paper, it is true that the proposition in the 'clause' preceding the *koto wa* is often something that has been recognized in the preceding discourse. Yet, it cannot be considered the topic of the sentence, because the second verb in the *koto wa* construction by itself is not the comment, and also because the whole sentence including the second verb is kind of an echo statement.

<sup>6</sup>I owe this observation to Knud Lambrecht.

<sup>7</sup>This point was brought to my attention by Yoshiko Matsumoto.

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