

The Semantics of Spontaneity in Japanese

Author(s): Wesley Jacobsen

*Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* (1981), pp. 104-115

Please see “How to cite” in the online sidebar for full citation information.

Please contact BLS regarding any further use of this work. BLS retains copyright for both print and screen forms of the publication. BLS may be contacted via <http://linguistics.berkeley.edu/bls/>.

---

*The Annual Proceedings of the Berkeley Linguistics Society* is published online via [eLanguage](#), the Linguistic Society of America's digital publishing platform.

## THE SEMANTICS OF SPONTANEITY IN JAPANESE

Wesley Jacobsen  
University of Chicago

Alfonso (1974) cites a situation where an English speaker and a Japanese speaker are watching a man fishing. Noting that when a fish is caught the English speaker will likely utter (1), whereas the Japanese speaker will likely utter (2), Alfonso states that there is a "constitutional" difference in the way English and Japanese speakers view such situations.

- (1) Look! He caught a fish.  
 (2) Aa! Sakana ga tureta.  
       fish NOM be-caught-PAST<sup>1</sup>  
 (Lit.) A fish was caught.

The English speaker views the situation as a change from not-catching to catching, whereas the Japanese speaker views the situation as a change from not-being-caught to being-caught. The Japanese speaker, in other words, adopts a "passive" perspective.

Apart from any assumptions regarding cross-cultural differences in perceptual patterns that may underlie Alfonso's observation, it is clear that Japanese displays a higher incidence of non-agentive constructions than English.<sup>2</sup> This paper will be concerned with morphologically intransitive non-agentive constructions, such as (2), corresponding to the unaccusative constructions of relational grammar. Such constructions typically have a single obligatory noun argument, marked nominatively in surface case, but semantically patient (*a la* Starosta, 1978) or theme (*a la* Gruber, 1976). They can be classified into four categories--existential, spontaneous, passive, and potential--of which I will deal with the last three. Those familiar with traditional Japanese grammar will recognize these three as categories traditionally used in describing the various functions of the verbal affix *rare* (classical *ru*), referred to as *zihatu*, *ukemi*, and *kanoo* in Japanese. With some peripheral exceptions, *rare* attaches to agentive predicates to create morphologically passive, spontaneous, and potential constructions. For that reason, the meaning categories in question have traditionally been treated as being part of the semantic content of *rare*. Part of my purpose in this paper, however, is to show that these meanings inherently reside in non-agentive *intransitive* constructions. It follows as a corollary that these meanings are associated with *rare* derivatively, by virtue of the fact that this affix has the effect of *creating* such intransitive constructions. Spontaneous constructions express simple happenings, where states of affairs come into existence apart from any external or internal agency:

- (3) Kinoo gakkoo de hidoi ziken ga okotta.  
 yesterday school LOC terrible incident NOM occur-PAST  
 A terrible incident occurred at school yesterday.

- (4) *Ii kangae ga ukanda.*  
 good idea NOM rise-up-PAST  
 A good idea came to mind (I got a good idea).

Agentless intransitives of the "passive" type have already been illustrated in (2). A limited number of verbs in this class allow an optional ni-marked agent:

- (5) *Keisatu ni tukamattara doo suru?*  
 police DAT be-caught-if what do  
 What will (you) do if (you're) caught by the police?  
 (6) *Warui koto o sitemo hito ni sugu sirete-simau.*  
 bad thing ACC do-even people DAT soon be-known  
 People soon find out when I do something bad.

Thirdly, there is a class of non-agentive intransitives which have a potential character, in that they are concerned with the possibility, either negative or positive, of a given event occurring:

- (7) *Ikura ositemo mado ga akanai.*  
 how-much push-even window NOM open-NEG.  
 No matter how much I push, the window won't open.  
 { I can't get the window open.  
 (8) *Sonna riron de wa setumei ga tukanai.*  
 that-kind theory with explanation NOM adhere-NEG  
 You can't provide an explanation with that kind of theory.  
 (9) *Kono senensatu kuzuremasu ka?*  
 this ¥1000-bill break-up-POL Q  
 Can (you) break this ¥1000 bill (for me)?  
 (10) *Sono tyeen wa kantan ni hazureru.*  
 that chain TOP easily come-off  
 That chain comes off easily.

Potential intransitives most commonly occur in negated contexts, such as (7) and (8), but examples of questions (9) and assertions (10) having a potential meaning can also be found.

Although a certain passive character is present in examples from all three of the categories passive, spontaneous, and potential, it would not be correct to subsume the three under a broad "passive" rubric, since "passive" carries with it the implication that some external agency is operative, and the existence of such external agency is clearly not a general meaning characteristic of examples such as (3) and (4). I will rather argue for an analysis whereby spontaneous constructions are taken to be the prototypes of an overarching category under which passive and potential constructions are subsumed as special cases. All the predicates in these categories express events that simply happen, apart from any internal agency of the subject. In the prototypical cases, no external agency is expressed either--some entity or situation simply comes into existence spontaneously. This coming into existence can take place either objectively (an "ontological" coming into existence, as in (3)) or in the subjective

domain of consciousness of the experiencer (an "epistemological" coming into existence, as in (4)).

Passive-type intransitive constructions are then a subcategory of spontaneous constructions which depart from the prototype in allowing external agents, sometimes overtly expressed by noun phrases marked with *ni*. The event in question is therefore understood as originating in an external source. Something happens to the subject so that it undergoes a change in state. Subjects in prototypical spontaneous constructions likewise undergo a change in state, but the event accompanying that change is not attributed to any particular source: the event, and often the subject together with it, simply comes into existence from a state of nothingness. Whether spontaneous or passive-like, however, non-agentive constructions are characterized by a nominative subject that is the locus of a change in state, never itself the initiator of that change.

Denoting the generalized class of spontaneous predicates as HAP-PEN predicates, another class complementary to this emerges which can be denoted as the class of DO predicates. DO predicates include garden-variety transitive verbs, as in (11), and agentive intransitives, as in (12).

- (11) Sagyooin ga koozi o mikka de siageta.  
workers NOM construction ACC three days in complete-PAST  
The workers completed the construction in three days.
- (12) Kakoi no naka de uma ga hasiri-mawatte-ita.  
fence GEN inside horse NOM run-around-PROG-PAST  
Inside the fence, a horse was running around.

Both of these examples illustrate what I have been referring to as "internal" agency: the semantic role of agent is borne by the subject noun phrase, marked with *ga*. In the transitive case, the semantic role of patient is borne by a distinct noun phrase marked by *o*, and in the intransitive case the patient is identifiable with the subject, so that subjects in agentive intransitive constructions have a dual semantic role--they are both the initiator of an event and the entity which changes state as a consequence.

Turning now to the class of potential HAP-PEN constructions illustrated in (7)-(10), note that these constructions bear all the structural characteristics of spontaneous constructions: the verbs are simple intransitives, having no overt potential morpheme, and the obligatory noun phrase is in each case semantically a patient. What it is that sets apart this subcategory of potential constructions from their garden-variety spontaneous counterparts can be seen by considering an example pair such as the following, where (13) is a garden-variety spontaneous construction and (14) a potential construction, although the verb is in either case morphologically identical.

- (13) Abunai! Tyeen ga hazureru yo.  
dangerous chain NOM come-off PART  
Watch out! The chain's going to come off.

- (14) Tyeen ga kantan ni hazureru kara muri ni hipparanakutemo ii.  
 chain NOM easily come-off because forcefully pull-NEG-even-good  
 The chain comes off easily, so you don't have to force it.

Several differences in the semantics of these two constructions can be pointed out. First, the verb in (13) has a distinctly future interpretation, which is lacking in (14). Secondly, (13) expresses an event which occurs at a specific point in time, whereas the first clause of (14) bears no reference to any particular point in time at all. Consequently, (13) is a statement about a (yet-to-occur) actual event, whereas the first clause in (14) makes no claim about the actual occurrence of any event.

These observations serve to show that garden-variety spontaneous and potential constructions differ basically in their aspectual character. Potential constructions are divorced from any specific point in time, and it is by virtue of this "timeless" character that they cease to make reference to any actual event. Put in formal terms, HAPPEN(E), where E is an event, is interpreted as POSSIBLE(HAPPEN(E)) in the absence of any grammatical or contextual element tying E down to a specific point in time.

This last statement should not be confused with the familiar axiom of modal logic whereby the truth of a proposition Q entails the truth of POSSIBLE(Q). Where temporal categories are under consideration, that axiom could only be interpreted as saying that the actuality of an event occurring entails the possibility of its occurring. However, as already pointed out, we are here dealing precisely with a class of cases where no such actuality is presumed.

A further indication that we are not simply dealing with a logical axiom is the fact that the same aspectual quality operates in negated contexts: NOT(HAPPEN(E)) is interpreted as NOT(POSSIBLE(HAPPEN(E))) when E is not tied down to a specific point in time. In (15), for example, E is the event of finding good work. The negated intransitive here does not simply express the fact that work has not been found, but that work cannot be found.

- (15) Syuusyoku zyootai ga hidokute ii sigoto ga nakanaka mitukaranai.  
 job situation NOM bad-GER good work NOM just be-found-NEG  
 The job situation is bad--good work just can't be found.

Negated intransitives are particularly susceptible of receiving potential interpretations in this way, a fact which is undoubtedly related to the adjectival status of the negative morpheme -nai in Japanese. Adjectives have precisely the timeless aspectual character that I have argued is typical of potential intransitive expressions. In any case, the fact that an expression of form NOT(POSSIBLE(E)) is interpreted as NOT(POSSIBLE(HAPPEN(E))) is not a result we would expect from modal logic, where the analogous entailment relationship is precisely the opposite--i.e., NOT(POSSIBLE(Q)) entails NOT(Q).

It is an accepted and well-known fact about lexically potential predicates that they are stative. This is a property shared with existential predicates and is reflected in the fact that the non-past

form of these predicates receives a "present" rather than a future interpretation. Contrast the different tense interpretation given to the non-past form of the potential predicate dekiru in (16) and the non-potential predicate iku in (17):

- (16) Kare wa eigo ga umaku dekiru.  
 he TOP English NOM well can  
 He can (speak) English well.
- (17) Kare wa ima gakkoo ni iku.  
 he TOP now school LOC go  
 He's going to go to school now.

While much attention has been paid to this aspectual characteristic of lexically potential predicates, however, little attention has been paid to the ability of simple intransitives to take on the same aspectual character. (16) is not a present-tense construction in the sense that it expresses an event which occurs at a specific point in time corresponding to the present. It rather possesses the same "timeless" character as spontaneous constructions divorced from any specific point in time. As a matter of fact, dekiru is a spontaneous predicate in its own right.

To illustrate this, it should be recalled that dekiru is traditionally given two dictionary glosses and is sometimes treated as a homophonous form for two distinct lexical items. The two glosses are "be able" and "be done, completed," illustrated in the following:

- (18) Kare wa baiorin no ensoo ga umaku dekiru.  
 he TOP violin GEN performance NOM well be-able  
 He (can) perform well on the violin.
- (19) Kare wa baiorin no ensoo ga umaku dekita.  
 he TOP violin GEN performance NOM well be-done-PAST  
 His violin performance was well done.
- (20) Saikin kinzyo ni atarasii tosyokan ga dekita.  
 recently neighborhood LOC new library NOM be-completed-PAST  
 Recently a new library was completed in the neighborhood.
- (21) Atarasii tosyokan ga dekiru made wa toobun gaman-sinakerewanarai.  
 new library NOM be-com. until for-now be-patient-must  
 We have to be patient for now until the new library is completed.

Note that the "be able" and "be done" readings are in complementary distribution. Specifically, the "be done" reading occurs only in the presence of some grammatical element, such as the past tense morpheme or the morpheme made "until," which ties the predicate down to a specific point in time. It is in such contexts that dekiru takes on the meaning of an actual event. The "be done" reading actually has a variety of English counterparts, such as "be built" or "be completed," all of which have something to do with an entity coming into existence. Etymologically, dekiru derives from the compound verb dete-kuru, which means to "come out," often with the specific implication of "come into existence." All of this points clearly to the fact that dekiru is a member of the class of spontaneous HAPPEN predicates. Its potential

meaning and garden-variety spontaneous meaning are simply aspectual variants of the sort observed for other members of the same class.

The same aspectual relationship between potential meaning and spontaneous actual meaning is observable in the morpheme (r)are, of which the potential morpheme (r)e can, for our purposes, be considered an allomorph:

- (22) Sinkansen no okage de Tookyoo kara Oosaka made sanzikan de ikeru.  
 GEN shadow INS SOURCE GOAL 3 hours in go-POT.  
 Thanks to the Shinkansen, you can get from Tokyo to Osaka in 3 hr.
- (23) Sinkansen no okage de Tookyoo kara Oosaka made sanzikan de iketa.  
 GEN shadow INS SOURCE GOAL 3 hrs. in go-POT-P.  
 Thanks to the Shinkansen, we were able to get from Tokyo to Osaka in 3 hours.

The past tense is here again associated with an actual event, although in both English and Japanese the potential morpheme is part of the overall sentential structure. "Spontaneous" (zihatu) and "potential" (kanoo) have been used to describe the functions of (r)are since the time of the classical grammarians. Since, however, the ability of simple intransitive constructions to take on the same meanings has been ignored the fact has consequently been obscured that (r)are is basically an intransitivizing affix which converts DO constructions into HAPPEN constructions. Agents in corresponding DO constructions are, with (r)are given a dative ni marking characteristic of possessors in possessive constructions or locatives in existential constructions:

- (24) Kare wa oisii keeki o tukutta.  
 he TOP delicious cake ACC make-PAST  
 He made a delicious cake.
- (25) Kare ni wa oisii keeki ga {tukurareru.  
 {tukureru.  
 he DAT TOP delicious cake NOM make-POT  
 He can make delicious cakes.

The aspectual contrast between (19) and (20) and between (24) and (25) occurs with spontaneous predicates in general. Just as they take on a potential character when divorced from any specific point in time, so they take on the meaning of an actual event when tied down to a specific point in time:

- (10) Sono tyeen wa kantan ni hazureru.  
 that chain TOP easily come-off  
 That chain comes off easily.
- (26) Tyeen ga hazureta.  
 chain NOM come-off  
 The chain came off.
- (27) Tyeen ga hazureru made zitensya ni notte-ikoo.  
 chain NOM come-off until bicycle LOC ride-go-let's  
 Let's ride the bicycle until the chain falls off.

The stative aspectual character of (10) gives rise to the interpretatio

"It is possible for the chain to come off." (26) and (27), by contrast, express actual events--one in the past (due to the past morpheme -ta) and one in the future (due to the morpheme made "until").

The aspectual character which typifies the potential use of HAPPEN predicates is paralleled by a tendency to view the potential event as being a property that inherently resides in the patient subject. There is a subject-property relationship between the noun phrase tyeen "chain" and the predicate hazureru "comes off" in (10) which parallels noun phrase + adjective constructions such as tyeen ga omoi "the chain is heavy." Properties of objects share the aspectual character of potential events in that they, too, are not bound to a specific point in time, although they can, of course, change over time. With HAPPEN predicates, the possibility of an event occurring is not seen as due to the ability of an agent to bring about the event, but as due to the inherent propensity of the event to occur, given the characteristics of the entity central to the event (i.e., the patient). The same relationship between potentiality and properties of patient subjects is also observable in certain English constructions, such as Linoleum floors clean easily, which can be paraphrased as Linoleum floors can be cleaned easily.

DO predicates differ from HAPPEN predicates in their ability to combine with lexically potential morphemes, as the following sentences illustrate:

- (28) John wa eigo } ga hanaseru. (DO)  
       TOP English } NOM speak-POT  
                   } ACC speak COMP be-able  
       John can speak English.
- (29) \*Iado ga akenai. (HAPPEN)  
       window NOM open<sub>n</sub> -POT-NEG  
       \*The window can't open.
- (30) \*Sono tyeen wa kantan ni hazurerareru. (HAPPEN)  
       that chain TOP easily come-off-POT  
       \*That chain can come off easily.

Attaching the potential morpheme (r)are to HAPPEN predicates such as aku "open<sub>n</sub>" and hazureru "come off" yields ungrammatical sentences in Japanese. The corresponding English sentences are, of course, not of very high acceptability either. When a predicate is capable of being used either as a HAPPEN or a DO predicate, it is only in its DO usage that it can co-occur with a potential morpheme:

- (31) Ringo wa zenbu kono hako ni hairu (\*haireru).  
       apple TOP all this box LOC go-in go-in-POT  
       The apples all fit in this box.
- (32) Kodomo nara sono horaana ni haireru.  
       child if that cave LOC go-in-POT  
       If you're a child, you can fit in that cave.

Under the analysis I have been setting forth in this paper, the

difference in acceptability between the potential constructions in (31) and (32) is clearly attributable to the fact that the HAPPEN construction in (31) is already potential in character, and the potential morpheme (r)e therefore creates an unwarranted redundancy.

Although the potential meaning of (r)e and the inherent potential meaning of (31) are close enough to count as redundant, (31) and (32) nevertheless provide a clear formal basis for distinguishing two types of potentiality: (a) a spontaneous type, due to the inherent propensity of an event to occur and (b) potentiality due to the ability of an agent to bring about an event. The resulting construction in either case has the "timeless" aspectual character described earlier, and there are additional affinities in areas such as case marking (nominative phrases in both construction types are non-agentive; agents, when they appear, are marked by ni). Nevertheless, an underlying agentive structure is transparent in the (b)-type constructions (e.g., (32)), both in the verbal morphology and in the fact that an agent, if not overt, is at least recoverable.

Certain verbs of perception provide particularly interesting examples of the interaction of a spontaneous and potential semantic in Japanese. Kikoeru "be heard, can hear" and mieru "be seen, can see" are intransitive verbs which take nominatively-marked patient noun phrases. These noun phrases represent objects that spontaneously present themselves to the perception of the experiencer, illustrating the "epistemological coming into existence" described earlier:

- (33) Mori no naka kara ookami no nakigoe ga kikoete-kita.  
forest inside SOURCE wolf GEN cry NOM be-heard-come-PAST  
(I) heard the cry of a wolf coming from inside the forest.
- (34) Tooku kara tiisana akari ga mieta.  
far SOURCE small light NOM be-seen-PAST  
(I) saw a small light in the distance.

As expected, these verbs take on a potential sense in contexts where they have a "timeless" aspectual character:

- (35) Kare ni wa mono ga kikoena.  
he DAT TOP things NOM can-hear-NEG  
He cannot hear (i.e., he is deaf).
- (36) Yane no ue kara huzisan ga mieru.  
roof GEN top SOURCE Mt. Fuji NOM be-seen.  
(You) can see Mt. Fuji from the rooftop.

Entities which "come into existence" in spontaneous constructions are typically marked with ga in spontaneous constructions, as in (37).

- (37) Sore o hanasite-iru uti ni ii kaiketusaku ga dete-kita.  
that ACC talk-PROG while good solution NOM come-out-PAST  
A good solution emerged as we were talking that over.

A similar notion of coming into existence is often expressed using naru or naru-type predicates. Naru means "become" and is normally associated

with the case marking pattern A ga B ni naru "A becomes B." In certain spontaneous constructions, however, where B is viewed as coming into existence from no particular source, naru appears with a single ni-marked noun phrase:

- (38) Ii tenki ni nari-soo da.  
good weather DAT become-seem COP  
It looks like it's going to be nice weather.
- (39) Sonna yarikata de wa syoobai ni naranai yo.  
that kind method with business DAT become-NEG PART  
A business won't succeed using methods like that.

A related sort of construction is frequently used to express plans or decisions:

- (40) Rainen Amerika ni ryuugaku-suru koto ni natta/kimatta.  
next year LOC study COMP DAT become-PAST/be-decided  
I'll be going to America to study next year. PAST

(40) avoids attributing the plan or decision to any particular agent or cause; things have developed in the indicated way spontaneously, as it were. In all three sentences (38)-(40), naru (or kimaru) not only co-occurs with no nominatively-marked subject, but there is not even a plausible candidate for filling the subject slot that will yield a grammatical utterance. The "subjectless" character of these expressions illustrates particularly graphically the notion of coming into existence from a state of nothingness that typifies the Japanese grammar of spontaneity.

I turn in conclusion to some observations of a more pragmatic nature. There is a tendency in Japanese conversation when showing deference toward one's interlocutor or some third party to avoid reference to the agency of that individual in bringing about a given state of affairs. Expressions of a spontaneous-like nature therefore frequently appear in polite conversation in Japanese.

Take, for instance, the case of a waitress approaching a customer in a cafe to see if the customer has decided what to order. She will be much likelier to approach the person with a HAPPEN expression such as (41) rather than a DO expression such as (42).

- (41) Nani ni suru ka kimarimasita ka?  
what DAT make Q be-decided-POL-PAST Q  
(Lit.) Has it been decided what you will have?
- (42) Nani ni suru ka kimemasita ka?  
what DAT make Q decide-POL-PAST Q  
Have you decided what you will have?

While there is a tendency to avoid reference to the agency of another party, there is, by contrast, a tendency to make reference to one's own agency, especially where an undesirable state of affairs has arisen. One is likely, for instance, to incur the displeasure of one's landlady when returning her borrowed stove in a broken condition if one makes explanation to her in the following way:

- (43) Okusan no sutoobu ga kowarete-simaimasita.  
 madam GEN stove NOM break<sub>in</sub>-POL-PAST  
 Madam, your stove broke.

Her displeasure will probably be mollified by using the following explanation instead:

- (44) Okusan no sutoobu o kowasite-simaimasita.<sup>5</sup>  
 madam GEN stove ACC break<sub>tr</sub>-POL-PAST  
 Madam, I broke your stove.

The reverse would, of course, be the case if someone else's responsibility were in question. If, for instance, one had lent one's own stove out to another person and later discovered it to be broken, one would, in making mention of the fact to the person, tend to avoid an accusatory utterance using transitive kowasu "break" and instead use intransitive kowareru "break."

There is nothing particularly unique to Japanese in the stove example. Referring to an event as a simple happening and thereby evading the assignment of responsibility to anyone for the event is undoubtedly a technique available in most natural languages. In Japanese, however, this phenomenon is grammaticalized to a much greater extent than would be expected merely on the basis of universal pragmatic principles.

This is especially evident in honorific expressions. One of the standard honorific expressions involves a predicate construction of the form o-V ni naru, where V is the infinitive form of a verb, o is an honorific prefix, and naru is the verb "become," discussed earlier as a spontaneous predicate par excellence. Use of this construction indicates deference to a "socially superior" person:

- (45) Sensei wa kesa no sinbun o o-yomi ni narimasita ka?  
 professor TOP morning paper ACC read-HON-PAST Q  
 Professor, did you read this morning's paper?

As (45) illustrates, the V in o-V ni naru is not limited to HAPPEN predicates, since yomi "read" is a DO predicate. Nevertheless, when verbal suppletion takes place in this construction, as often happens, the suppletion tends to be in the direction of a HAPPEN predicate:

- (46) Tanaka sensei ga o-mie ni narimasita.  
 prof. NOM appear-HON-PAST  
 Prof. Tanaka has come.

Mie in (46) is the infinitive form of the verb mieru "be seen, become visible," a HAPPEN predicate which here functions as the suppletive form of the DO predicate kuru "come." Honorific expressions of the o-V ni naru type in this way exhibit a two-fold spontaneous character, as seen in the presence of the naru predicate and in the tendency to supplete toward HAPPEN predicates.

Given this tendency toward spontaneous grammatical forms in polite language, it follows naturally that the affix rare, otherwise

used to create HAPPEN out of DO constructions, should itself be used as an honorific marker:

- (47) Tanaka sensei wa asita Tookyoo ni ikareru soo desu.  
           prof. TOP tomorrow           LOC go-HON REP COP  
 I hear that Prof. Tanaka is going to Tokyo tomorrow.

To summarize, I have considered three categories of meaning--passive, spontaneous, and potential--that arise in simple intransitive constructions and have attempted to provide a rationale for their unified morphological expression by treating passive and potential expressions as special cases of an overarching class of spontaneous expressions. Spontaneous expressions are characterizable as representing events that simply happen (i.e., come into existence) apart from any expressed agency or cause. Central to these expressions is a noun phrase which is nominative in surface case and patient in semantic case. In prototypical spontaneous constructions, this noun phrase is itself an entity that comes into existence as part of the event; i.e., it changes from a state of nothingness to a state of existing. Passive-type intransitive constructions are a departure from the spontaneous prototype in that the change in state sustained by the patient is imposed from the outside and also in that *ni*-marked "external" agents are sometimes allowed. Non-agentive potential expressions are fundamentally aspectual variants of spontaneous expressions, divorced from any locus in real time and typically expressing a property of the patient. This type of potentiality, attributable to the inherent propensity of an event to occur, is formally distinguished in Japanese from a potentiality attributable to the ability of an agent to bring the event about. There is a principle operative whereby omission of reference to an individual's agency in bringing an event about is interpreted as deferential. Spontaneous expressions therefore appear frequently in the language of politeness and honorification.

#### FOOTNOTES

1. The following abbreviations are used to indicate grammatical elements in literal glosses of example sentences in this paper: ACC accusative case, COMP sentential complementizer, COP copula, DAT dative case, GEN genitive case, GER gerund inflection, GOAL goal case, HON honorific marker, INS instrumental case, LOC locative case, NEG negative morpheme, NOM nominative case, PART sentential particle, PAST past tense morpheme, POL politeness marker, POT potential morpheme, PROG progressive morpheme, REP reportative morpheme, Q question morpheme, SOURCE source case, and TOP topic marker.

2. The sense of "agent" relevant to what I have to say in this paper refers to any entity capable of movement or action under its own power and as such covers a broader range of cases than this term is typically used to cover. Certain natural phenomena, for instance, count as "agentive" under this broader rubric, as in the following example.

- (i) Kaze ga huite-iru.

The wind is blowing.

In an earlier paper (Jacobsen, 1979) I used the term "dynamic" to

indicate this extended range of agentive constructions. Since the borderline cases are not crucial to the arguments made in this paper, and so as to avoid terminological confusion, I have here adhered to the traditional agentive/non-agentive terminology.

3. For a reflexive analysis of agentive intransitive constructions, see Jacobsen (1979).

4. Initial /r/ is deleted in these morphemes when attached to consonant final verb stems.

5. (43) and (44) are based upon an actual anecdote related by Mizutani Osamu of the Nihon Kokuritu Kokugo Kenyuuzyo at a talk given at the University of Tsukuba in the fall of 1978.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alfonso, Anthony (1974), Japanese Language Patterns; Sophia University L. L. Center of Applied Linguistics, Tokyo.
- Gruber, Jeffrey (1976), Lexical Structures in Syntax and Semantics; North Holland.
- Inoue, Kazuko (1976), Henkei Bunpoo to Nihongo (Part II); Taishukan, Tokyo
- Jacobsen, Wesley (1979), "Transitive Verbs, Dynamic Verbs, and Aspect in Japanese," in Papers from the Fifteenth Regional Meeting, Chicago Linguistic Society, Chicago.
- Kuno, Susumu (1973), The Structure of the Japanese Language; MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass.
- Martin, Samuel (1975), A Reference Grammar of Japanese; Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Perlmutter, David, and Postal, Paul (1978), "The 1-Advancement Exclusiveness Law" (unpublished manuscript).
- Starosta, Stanley (1978) "The One Per Sent Solution" in Valence, Semantic Case, and Grammatical Relations (ed. Werner Abraham); John Benjamins B. V., Amsterdam.

Funding for various stages of research behind this paper was provided by the Social Science Research Council, the Japan Ministry of Education, and the Japanese Studies Dissertation Writing Fellowship of the Center for Far Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago.