The position of *to*/∅-marked mimetics in Japanese sentence structure

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Japanese mimetics marked by either the particle *to* ('quotative' elsewhere) or ∅ (e.g. *nikoniko-to/nikoniko* 'smilingly') are typically classed as adverbials (e.g. Shibatani 1978). Therefore, two characteristics of adverbials are naturally assumed for them: first, they are adjuncts (i.e. syntactically omissible); second, they have a variable sentence position. These assumptions, however, have not been rigorously evaluated. While Toratani (2006) implies that the placement of mimetics is relevant to the information structure, what renders mimetics able to occupy a particular position has not been fully discussed. In this paper, I examine (a) the position of *to*/∅-marked mimetics with respect to the clause-mate verb in the linear order of the sentence and (b) their position in the constituent projection of the layered structure of the clause (Van Valin 2005). I argue that a *to*/∅-marked mimetic's possible positions are (i) syntactically more varied than previously assumed (Toratani 2007) and (ii) mainly affected by syntactic and discourse/pragmatic factors.

Mimetics consist of three core forms: reduplicated (*nikoniko* 'smilingly'), *ri*-suffixed (*yukkuri* 'slowly') and one-time instantiated (*ton* 'a tap'). Previous work has investigated the position of reduplicated mimetics with respect to the verb (e.g. Toratani 2006), leaving other forms unexamined. To paint a more comprehensive picture, I examine the position of all three forms. A preliminary analysis of the data gathered from literary texts (1,000 tokens) shows that mimetics can appear anywhere preverbally, but the most frequent position is the immediate preverbal position for all three forms. This leads to the question of whether they constitute a single kind as they occupy the same position. Additionally, one might wonder if the placement of a mimetic in this position is motivated solely by information structure, i.e. pragmatics. To answer these questions, the present work applies linguistic tests (e.g. permutability). The finding is that *to*/∅-marked mimetics include both adjuncts and non-adjuncts. An example of the latter includes 'a mimetic adjectival' such as *kat-to* in *kat-to naru* 'become enraged' (1a). Here, strict adjacency to the verb is required as indicated by the invariability of the mimetic's position in (1b), showing that the immediate preverbal position is syntactically motivated, at least for some mimetics.

(1) a. *Otoko-wa   kyuuni   kat-to   nat-ta.*
         man-TOP   suddenly   MIMETIC-P(ARTICLE) become-PAST
         'The man suddenly became enraged'.
     b. **Otoko-wa   kat-to   kyuuni   nat-ta.*
         man-TOP   MIMETIC-P   suddenly   become-PAST
         (intended) 'The man suddenly became enraged'.

As adjuncts, mimetics ('mimetic adverbs') occupy different positions within the sentence. For instance, in (2a), the mimetic *put-to* 'with a puff' occurs in the left-detached position crossing the topic, whereas in (2b) it occurs in the immediate preverbal position.

(2) a. *Put-to   syoozyo-wa   hukidasi-ta.*   (Asada 1999: 160)
         MIMETIC-P   girl-TOP   burst.out.laughing-PAST
         '*With a puff*, the girl burst out laughing.'
     b. *Syoozyo-wa   put-to   hukidasi-ta.*
         girl-TOP   MIMETIC-P   burst.out.laughing-PAST
         The girl burst out laughing *with a puff*.'

Putting the mimetic before the topic, as in (2a) reverses the normal flow of discourse (given-first, new-later): upon hearing *put-to*, the hearer can envision a release of air but what actually puffed is unknown until the rest of the sentence is heard. This differs from (2b) which follows the normal flow of discourse: as the topic (given) is revealed earlier than the mimetic (new), the puff is construed as related to the girl's action. Since there is no change in the truth-conditional meaning (cf. (2a) vs. (2b)), discourse/pragmatics is largely responsible for variations in the position of mimetic adverbs.

In Kita (2008:31), Japanese is described as a language that places sound-symbolic words "in a mid-sentence position", as compared to languages that place them "only at the periphery (beginning or end) of a sentence". This paper finds that Japanese belongs to a third type which utilizes both positions, as in certain other languages, such as Pastaza Quechua (Nuckoll 1996) and Upper Necaxa Totonac (Beck 2007).

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