

# The Grammatical Voice in Japanese



The Grammatical Voice in Japanese:  
A Typological Perspective

By

Junichi Toyota

**CAMBRIDGE  
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P U B L I S H I N G

The Grammatical Voice in Japanese: A Typological Perspective,  
by Junichi Toyota

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TO MY PARENTS,  
MARIKO & HIDEKAZU TOYOTA  
MY FIRST LANGUAGE AS THEIR GIFT MEETS MY TALENT  
IN THIS BOOK



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The monograph stems from my old research carried out in Dublin back in the late 90s. Through a long hibernation, my ideas about the passive voice in general have evolved dramatically and the current shape bears very little of the original form. The passive voice is a very elusive grammatical category and it is difficult to define. Due to this nature, it can offer a number of interesting features for analysis, but analyses tend to be controversial. I hope that this monograph will be a small contribution in clarifying some topics in a diverse range of research area commonly discussed under the passive voice.

I am deeply indebted to some scholars concerning my research and want to express my gratitude in particular to the following three: Prof. John. I. Saeed, my teacher of linguistics, for his guidance while I was in Dublin and thereafter; Prof. Bernd Heine, my hero in linguistics, for his pioneering works on historical linguistics and for his encouragement; and Prof. Charles L. Drage for his encouragement and professional and yet friendly guidance in my research. I have also been supported by numerous friends and fellow scholars over the past several years. Among them, I would like to thank Jordan Zlatev, Lars Larm, Julie Stewart-Sandgren, Vesna Polovina, Borko Kovačević and Dragana Grbić.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Accusative
AOR	Aorist
APL	Applicative
ATTR	Attributive form
CAUS	Causative
CONJ	Conjunction
CONT	Continuative
COP	Copula
CUST	Customary
DAT	Dative
DEC	Declarative
DEF	Definite
DETRANS	Detransitive
DIR	Directive
ERG	Ergative
FEM	Feminine
FOC	Focus
FUT	Future
GEN	Genitive
HUM	Humble
ILL	Illative
IMP	Imperative
IMPR	Impersonal
INAC	Inactive
INAN	Inanimate
INF	Infinitive
INST	Instrument
INTER	Interrogative
INTR	Intransitive
INV	Inverse
LOC	Locative
MASC	Masculine
MID	Middle
NEG	Negative
NEUT	Neuter

NOM	Nominative, Nominaliser
NONFUT	Non-future
OBJ	Object
OBL	Oblique
PASS	Passive
PL	Plural
PP	Post position
PRF	Perfect
PRFV	Perfective
PROG	Progressive
PRS	Present
PRT	Participle
PST	Past
REF	Reflexive
RES	Resultative
SG	Singular
STAT	Stative
SUB	Subject
TOP	Topic
VN	Verbal noun

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **Introduction**

The subject matter of this book is the semantic and pragmatic analysis of the Japanese passive voice in diachronic perspective. The passive voice has received much attention over the past several decades. Grammatical voice itself is complex and there are a number of properties yet to be analysed. A large number of previous publications are dedicated to issues of grammatical voice per se (e.g. Siewierska 1984; Keenan 1985; Geniušienė 1987; Kemmer 1993; Kleiman 1991; just to name a few) or to the interrelationship within the voice systems, sometime known as the voice continuum (e.g. Croft 1994, 2001: 283-319; Givón 1990: 563-644; Palmer 1994: 142-175; Shibatani 1985, 1998), which reveal that the active, passive and middle voice are somehow related to each other and that there are certain patterns among them. The study of the grammatical voice has received much attention during the last couple of decades, mostly due to the awareness of the importance of the valence and its alternation system in the syntactic theory.

The system of grammatical voice has been presented in the grammar books of numerous languages and it is safe to say that it is almost always mentioned in some way. However, what is treated as the passive may vary from book to book. This means that the actual languages are described according to a scholar's own discipline, belief, intuition, etc. Thus, there is a danger of a misinterpretation of the data. There certainly was, and there remains to a certain degree, a trend of having an anglocentric view on the description of grammar in modern linguistics. The grammar of various languages was described on the basis of constructions in English alone. The passive is a good example for such cases: in some languages, a periphrastic construction similar to 'copula + main verb in past participle', based on its surface structure, is blindly named passive and if there is no matching construction, the passive meaning is often considered to be expressed by alternative constructions, such as indefinite pronouns. The English structure has unvolitionally been influencing the description of

other languages (cf. Andersen 1990: 142ff.; Toyota 2004; Toyota and Mustafović 2006).

In this respect, the Japanese passive has a lot to offer for better understanding of the passive voice as well as the grammatical voice in general, both synchronically and diachronically. It is hoped that this book will reveal several points that link the Japanese passive to the typological generalisation of the passive.

## General overview of voice system in Japanese

The grammatical voice system and its related grammatical operations are highly complex, especially typologically, as extensively illustrated in Payne (1997: 167-222). It still remains a question why some languages have a more complex voice system, and there do not seem to be any generalisations concerning distributional patterns of different voice structures (see, however, Toyota (2009, forthcoming) for an argument linking the voice with alignment change). We will return to this question later in Chapter 7 in terms of the voice continuum. When it comes to the grammatical voice in Japanese, its system is rather simple, consisting only of the active voice and the passive voice.

Particularly in relation to the passive, it is often difficult to define this specific grammatical voice. One of the problems is its diversity in different languages (cf. Chapter 7), but in every language, an eminent problem is the dichotomy between form and function. Formal analysis often presupposes the presence of passive markers such as affixes, and the active voice counterpart to the passive (cf. Siewierska 1984: 256). And in the passive voice, there is a shift in the number of argument in comparison with the active counterpart, and one less argument is expected and the alternation of an active clause into a passive one is known as valency decreasing operation. The subject in the active voice is turned into an oblique object in the passive voice, making its valence with one less argument. These formal claims can be schematised in Figure 1.

Active		Passive
NP1 - VP (ACTIVE) -	=	NP2 - VP (PASSIVE) - (NP1)
SUB		OBJ                      SUB                      OBL

**Figure 1.** Schematic representation of active-passive alternation (Toyota 2008: 9)

A number of so-called functionalists claim different aspects of the passive clause as criteria. Some consider the passive as a type of discourse functional marker such as topicality (cf. Givón 1979: 186; 1983). Others

consider that impersonalisation of agent, or agent defocusing is a key in the passive structure (cf. Shibatani 1985). Between these two ideas, Haspelmath (1990: 60) argues that impersonalisation is more basic than topicalisation, since the former allows the latter to happen. Others argue that the passive is an indicator of a transitive clause, since passivisation is more readily available with a highly transitive clause (Kittilä 2002: 23). This makes sense, since according to Hopper and Thompson (1980), when a clause is highly transitive its subject tends to be highly topical in discourse, too.

Facing these diverse views on the passive from previous research it is practically impossible to define what the passive is. A problem here is that the functional views often do not correspond to the formal views. Thus, we are forced to make a definition of the passive, however, rough it may be. The passive voice in this work refers to a structure where a formal marker is obligatorily present, and the passive voice induces a valency decreasing operation. We also assume the active counterpart. In this sense, the definition corresponds to the formal view. Functional views are highly useful and our basic approach is indeed the one taken by functionalists. A number of previous studies on the passive incorporate topicalisation or impersonalisation, but we only incorporate transitivity as a part of our definition, and the passive clause has to be highly transitive. In a way, this definition can be divided into syntactic and semantic features, e.g. the presence of a formal marker and an active counterpart, the valency reducing operation (syntactic) and high transitivity based on different features as found in, for instance, Hopper and Thompson (1980) or Taylor (2003) (semantic). These characteristics are summarised in Table 1, along with the chapters that deal with each characteristic.

**Table 1. Grammatical characteristics for defining the passive voice**

	Characteristics	Relevant chapters
Syntactic	Presence of formal marker	Chapter 2
	Valency reducing operation	Chapter 3, Chapter 7
	Active counterpart	Chapter 3
Semantic	Transitivity	Chapter 5, Chapter 6

## Various approaches to the Japanese passive

Japanese has been considered to possess a binary opposition in the grammatical voice, i.e. the active and passive voice, and the boundary between them is marked by the passive suffix *-(r)are*. However, note that according to scholars, the domain of grammatical voice varies. The most

common voice system is a ternary active-middle-passive one, but other types of constructions are also considered under the domain of the grammatical voice. These types include applicative, circumstantial, antipassive, causative, anticausative, etc. Whatever the type of construction is, the syntactic property seems to override differences in terms of semantics and pragmatics in the voice system. This syntax-based analysis has an enormous influence on the grammatical approaches which are illustrated below, and both traditional and modern approaches assume this.

Specifically concerning the Japanese passive, there have been two main opposing approaches. We look at each of them in turn below. We leave the detailed explanation of the Japanese passive until Chapter 2, and we simply illustrate how various approaches treat the passive differently. Notice that a main grammatical difference between them is the number of arguments involved in a clause, and this illustrates a typologically rare case of the passive, i.e. an increase in the number of arguments.

### **Uniform and non-uniform theory**

A theoretical distinction is often made between uniform and non-uniform theories of the passive in Japanese. The basic question is how to treat direct and indirect passives, i.e. whether to treat them in the same way or treat them separately. The former is called *the uniform theory* and the latter, *the non-uniform theory*. We briefly review each theory below and go on to discuss a key feature distinguishing the two theories, the treatment of the reflexive pronoun, *zibun* ‘-self’.

### **Uniform theory**

In this theory, mainly developed by Kuroda (1965, 1979), Howard and Niyekawa-Howard (1976), Kuroda (1983), it is assumed that both the direct and indirect passive have an embedded sentence which acts as a deep structure, i.e. the passive morpheme acts like a predicate which requires a sentential complement, and the subject of this embedded sentence corresponds to the surface object. If the matrix sentence has a subject, the subject in the embedded sentence is deleted, and if the matrix has a subject, it will be raised and case-marked by *ni*. Consider the examples in (1) and (2):

## Direct passive

- (1) *Paul-wa George-ni wagamama dato hinans-are-ta*  
 Paul-FOC George-to selfish as criticise-PASS-PST  
 ‘Paul was criticised for being selfish by George.’

## Indirect passive

- (2) *Paul-wa John-ni shin-are-ta*  
 Paul-FOC John-to die-PASS-PST  
 ‘Paul was adversely affected by John’s death.’

In these examples, the internal sentence, i.e. the embedded sentence, can be represented as in (3) and (4):

## Direct passive

- (3) [*Paul ga [George ga Paul wo wagamama dato hinansuru] are ta*]

## Indirect passive

- (4) [*Paul ga [John ga shinu] are ta*]

In general, as Shibatani (1990: 320) says, the direct passive is always associated with an adversative reading and this implication of adversity is regarded as the property of the higher verb *-rare* (Howard and Niyekawa-Howard 1976). In this theory, both direct/indirect passives are supposed to imply adversity since they have an underlying structure with *-rare*.

### Non-uniform theory

This theory is mainly discussed by McCawley (1976) and Kuno (1973, 1978). The main idea of this theory is summarised in Howard and Niyekawa-Howard (1976). The term NON-UNIFORM refers exclusively to the view that the different passives are derived from distinctive underlying structures, i.e. there is a correspondence between active and passive forms as in (5):

- (5) a. *George-ga gitaa-wo hik-u*  
 George-TOP guitar-ACC play-PRS  
 ‘George plays the guitar.’  
 b. *Gitaa-ga George-ni yotte hik-are-ru*  
 guitar-TOP George-by.means.of play-PASS-PRS  
 ‘The guitar is played by George.’

The direct passive sentence (5b) is therefore the result of a subject-object shift. For the indirect passive, however, this approach still presupposes an embedded sentence as in the uniform theory, thus our earlier example (2) still assumes the embedded sentence (4). We repeat it in (6) for clarity:

Embedded sentence

(6) [Paul ga [John ga shinu] are ta]

It is worthwhile mentioning that unlike in the uniform theory, the implication of adversity is only supposed to exist in the indirect passive, as the direct passive does not have the passive morpheme *-rare* in its underlying structure.

### Reflexive pronoun, *zibun* ‘-self’

As a basic notion, the reflexive pronoun *zibun* ‘-self’ must have its subject as an antecedent. In the direct passive this can potentially cause a problem in understanding its referent in the direct passive, as it has two subjects, one in the matrix sentence and the other in the embedded sentence. Consider (7). We can express the embedded sentence of (7) as in (8).

(7) *John-wa zibun-no ie-no mae-de fan-ni*  
 John-FOC self-GEN house-GEN front-at fan-DAT  
*ut-are-te*  
 shoot-PASS-PST  
 ‘John was shot by a fan in front of self’s house.’

(8) [John [fan John ***zibun*** no ie no mae de ut] are ta]

The problem is whether this *zibun* refers to *fan* or *John*. If *zibun* refers to the matrix subject, then no reflexivisation is assumed in the embedded sentence, but in the matrix sentence, it is. If *zibun* refers to *fan*, then the reflexivisation happens in the embedded sentence and the object *John* is deleted.

In non-uniform theory, the subject in the direct passive is the antecedent of the pronoun, as there are not two subjects at any stage of passivisation. However, in uniform theory, there is supposed to be an embedded sentence, i.e. there exist two subjects which can possibly be an antecedent as exemplified in (8) above. As to the indirect passive, in both



theories, an embedded sentence is expected and there is no difference in approach to the pronoun.

Considering the two theories reviewed above, the non-uniform theory assumes two separate approaches to each type of the passive, and the direct passive normally produces one antecedent, and it assumes an active-passive correspondence. Howard and Niyekawa-Howard (1976: 68) propose a method to prevent a coreferentiality of *zibun* with the subject in an embedded sentence. They argue that NP in the embedded sentence undergoes the reflexivisation before being deleted, and if there are two different referents for *zibun*, this sentence is discarded through a constraint called reflexive coreference constraint (RCC), which is shown below in (9). We may note that this RCC must be applied after the reflexivisation and before the embedded object deletion.

- (9) Reflexive Coreference Constraint (RCC)  
 Two subjects of the reflexive pronoun *zibun* commanded by the same pair of possible antecedents must be coreferential. If they are not, the sentence is marked as ungrammatical.

This seems to be the only restriction on the coreferentiality of the reflexive pronoun in the literature.

## Uniqueness of the Japanese passive

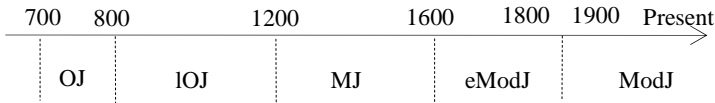
As discussion of uniform and non-uniform theories shows, the Japanese passive involves some typologically rare grammatical characteristics. Some features, such as the number of arguments, have been commonly discussed in typological literature, but others have not been noticed much. We simply list such features in (10). Some features may not make any sense at this point, but they will reveal some crucial points in understanding the Japanese passive in a typological perspective. We refer to relevant chapters for each feature.

- (10) a. The valency increasing operation (Chap. 2, 3, 6)  
 b. The lack of the middle voice in Japanese (Chap. 5, 6, 7)  
 c. Facilitative reading in potential passive (Chap. 7)  
 d. Spontaneous passive and perception verbs (Chap. 2, 7)  
 e. Actor maker *-ni* (Chap. 7)  
 f. Pragmatic inference with politeness (Chap. 6, 7)

## Aim and method of study

The aim of the current work is to provide a through description of the Japanese passive, both synchronic and diachronic and analyse the details of the construction from typological perspectives. This entails various topics in linguistic studies, such as syntactic and semantic behaviours, functional characteristics and discourse constraints. We do not intend to provide an explanation on a basis of a particular grammatical theory, and this is a quite descriptive work. However, it should be noted that it is strongly biased towards the cognitive grammar (cf. Langacker 1991) and construction grammar approach (cf. Goldberg 1995; Croft 2001).

This study also looks at historical development, which requires the classification of periods concerning earlier Japanese. Japanese is one of the rare languages in the world with rich written historical material, the oldest of which dates back to the early eighth century, e.g. *Kojiki* (712), containing Japanese mythology and legendary history, *Nihon Shoki* (720), a chronicle, and *Manyoshu* (759), an anthology. Thus, our chronology starts from the year 700, and based on Miller (1967), Kaiser (1991) and Takeuchi (1999), we adopt a detailed distinction of time, dividing the time up to now into five different periods, i.e. Old Japanese (OJ, 700-800); Late Old Japanese (IOJ, 800-1200); Middle Japanese (MJ, 1200-1600); Early Modern Japanese (eModJ, 1600-1850); Modern Japanese (ModJ, 1850-Present), as schematically represented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** Diachronic classification of periods in Japanese

We use a limited number of naturally occurring data from Modern Japanese (ca. 200 examples) as a small corpus, taken from Toyota (1998). This is a manually collected data set from both spoken and written sources. Details of sources are listed in the Appendix. It is clear that this sample is not large enough to claim anything statistically significant, but a hint of tendency can be found even within this sample. Thus, we take results from this corpus as an indicator, and further research with a larger number of examples can reveal more statistically-valid results.

## **Organisation of the study**

This study starts with description of the passive in Japanese in Chapter 2, identifying five different types of passive. Chapter 3 deals with morphosyntactic characteristics. Syntactic features do not play a central role in this study, but at the same time, they cannot be completely separated from semantic and pragmatic features of the passive. Descriptions here may be brief, but will be important in later chapters. Chapter 4 focuses on morphosemantic features, covering a wide range of structures and features such as animacy, alienability, affectedness, topicalisation, impersonalisation and scope of negation.

Chapters 1 to 4 are mainly concerned with the presentation of data and basic grammatical characteristics, but chapters 5 to 7 discuss specific features from a typological perspective. Chapter 5 presents historical changes of the Japanese passive voice, identifying chronology of five different structures. However, these changes are discussed in terms of alignment change here, arguing that earlier Japanese had a different type of alignment from that of modern Japanese. Chapter 6 analyses transitivity from a historical perspective. This is also closely connected to the alignment change (cf. Chapter 5) and mental verbs. In addition, this chapter also examines the actor marker in the Japanese passive. Chapter 7 focuses on the voice continuum by comparing different types of continuum found in other languages with that in Japanese. A particular focus is put on the middle voice, especially from a historical perspective.



## CHAPTER TWO

# DESCRIPTION OF THE JAPANESE PASSIVE

### Introduction

In this chapter, we will analyse several basic types of the passive voice in Japanese. As will be revealed shortly, there are five different types and each type has its own syntactic and semantic characteristics. What is interesting is that all of these passives are structurally identical, i.e. there is a passive morpheme *-(r)are* attached to a verb. The analysis made here is quite descriptive and each of the five types is studied separately. Several points described in this chapter are further analysed from a typological perspective in later chapters.

### Different types of the passive

The Japanese passive is morphologically formed by adding the passive suffix *-(r)are* to the verb stem. This suffix is, however, not exclusively used as the passive marker, and it is multi-functional. In traditional studies of Japanese grammar, different meanings created by this are commonly considered as variations of the passive, and five different types are commonly assumed from the same structure with the suffix *-(r)are*. We leave the evaluation of each construction until later in this chapter, but we first introduce characteristics of each type.

### Verbal passive

Verbal passive is what can be commonly found across languages as the prototypical passive and this type nicely fits in our definition of the passive, i.e. it involves the active-passive alternation and the valency-decreasing operation can be observed in this type. However, semantically and functionally, this type may be somewhat different, since the involvement of topicality is not so simple. Japanese is a topic prominence language (cf. Li and Thompson 1976) and there are specific markers for both focus (i.e. *-ga*) and topic (i.e. *-wa*). The passive subject is likely to be

topical, and therefore one would expect a topic marker *-wa* is commonly used. However, the passive is formed with both topic and focus marker attached to the subject, as exemplified in (11) and (12), respectively.

- (11) *Kare-ga ookuno hito-ni hinans-are-ta*  
 he-FOC many people-DAT criticise-PASS-PST  
 ‘He was criticised by many people.’
- (12) *Kare-wa ookuno hito-ni hinans-are-ta*  
 he-TOP many people-DAT criticise-PASS-PST  
 ‘He was criticised by many people.’

The examples like (11) and (12) clearly indicate that the Japanese passive does not always follow the functionally common properties of topicalisation, i.e. examples with topic marker like (12) are supposed to be a typologically common type, while those with focus marker like (11) are likely to be a typologically rarer type. Japanese is a pro-drop language and the subject is not obligatory, although it is preferable. In Table 2, the distribution of the topic or focus marker from our sample is shown. If the grammatical subject is not overtly expressed, a contextually more natural marker is assumed and added to the overall data. Following the table, some actual examples from our data are shown, (13) and (14) are with focus marker, and (15), with topic marker.

**Table 2. Distribution of topic and focus marker in verbal passive**

Focus marker <i>-ga</i>	Topic marker <i>-wa</i>	Total
79 (55.6%)	63 (44.4%)	142 (100%)

- (13) *Sore-ga kindai-ka-ni yotte kyoujikas-are-te*  
 that-FOC modernisation-by.means.of synchronise-PASS-CONJ  
*shimat-ta*  
 LIGHT-PST  
 ‘that was synchronised by the modernisation.’ (*Kankyou* 23, B.120)
- (14) *Kore-wo miruto, genin-wa hajimete meihakuni,*  
 this-ACC look.at servant-FOC first time clearly  
*kono rouba-no seishi-ga, zenzen, jibun-no*  
 this old.woman-GEN life-FOC completely oneself-GEN  
*ishi-ni shihais-are-tei-ru toiukoto-wo ishikishi-ta.*  
 will-DAT control-PASS-STAT-PRS fact-ACC realise-PST