Two types of indirect (gapless) passives in Japanese

This paper proposes that Japanese indirect (gapless) passives, i.e., passives that lack active counterparts, should be divided into two types: pseudo-passives [1] and context-passives [2]. The former differs from the latter in two respects: they do not require supportive context to be acceptable (i.e., they are well-formed out of the blue), and they have active counterparts (the nominative subject of this type is underlingly an object of a postpositional phrase). This paper addresses two important issues that contribute to our understanding of universal properties of passive constructions: cross-linguistic variation in terms of what qualifies as the subject of the passive, and syntactic implication of context.

1. Background: Japanese has at least two types of passives, direct [3] and indirect passives [1 & 2]; the former type has an active counterpart and the latter type appears not to (Hoshi 1999). The closest active counterparts of [1] and [2] are presented in [4] and [5] respectively: note that the nominative subject of the passives (i.e., Ken) is not contained in the active counterpart. Thus, English-type movement analysis, i.e., deriving the passive from its active counterpart, is not an option for Japanese indirect passives. The standard analysis assumes that the passive morpheme ‘rare’ selects an experiencer-like affectee argument (i.e., Ken) and a clausal complement (i.e., rain descend) and means ‘be-(adversely)-affected’ (Kuroda 1979). Interestingly, the literature notes that in order to be well-formed some indirect passives (e.g., [2]) require supportive context in which the nominative DP of the passive is adversely affected by the event denoted in the complement clause (e.g., [6]) (inter alia Kubo 1992). In fact, I found [2] unacceptable, and cannot easily come up with a licensing context. This raises a question: what does it mean if a sentence requires context in order to be acceptable, and the acceptability depends on how easily a speaker can come up with a supportive context. As far as I know, the reason some indirect passives require context, and the exact licensing properties of the required context have never been discussed. Further, why some indirect passives require context while others do not has not been identified.

2. The facts: First, the grammaticality judgment questionnaire survey with 74 native speakers was conducted in order to see whether there is dichotomy in terms of judgments when the indirect passives were presented in null context. The results show that certain types of indirect passives (i.e., pseudo-passives: [1]) do not generally require context, whereas others (i.e., context-passives: e.g., [2]), which are reported to be well-formed in the literature, are not acceptable when presented in null context. Further, the new observation is that there is an individual variability with respect to what kind of affectee context makes such context-passives acceptable. Crucially it is not the case that any kind of affectee context licenses context-passives: more than 70% of the participants could not accept the [2] with context [6]. In order to understand the properties of necessary context, interviews with individual speakers were conducted. Context [7] that was given by one speaker as a licensing context of [2] does not allow one another speaker to accept [2]. The latter speaker offers [7] as a licensing context, but the former speaker could not accept [2] with such context. Further, none of the contexts ([6]-[8]) make [2] well-formed to some speakers including myself. In all of the contexts, the nominative DP of the passive is adversely affected by the complement event clause: if –rare- really means ‘be-affected’, this variability is a puzzle.

3. Proposed analysis for indirect passives: The analysis this paper proposes is that the first type of indirect passives that do not require context is pseudo-passives: the nominative DP is underlingly an object of a postposition. The reason this type of passives was assumed to lack active counterpart is (i) the nominative DP is not realized as an accusative DP in the active counterparts: they are dative or source argument of the main verb (ex. [9] (ii) the active counterpart sometimes do not sound natural due to discourse reasons: what’s important is what kind of argument the main verb licenses and whether that argument qualifies to be the subject of the passive (the argument remains to carry the same theta role both in the active and the passive counterparts: [10]). The proposal is that the passives that are acceptable in null context are direct passive: they have active counterparts, and are pseudo-passives (an object of a dative or a dative phrases). This suggests that Japanese allows a wider variety of argument to qualify as the subject of the passive than for example, English does. Turning to the context-passives, the idea I pursue is that context introduces a silent applicative head, which introduces an argument. It is difficult to think that –rare- is a lexical item that means ‘be_affected’, due to the huge individual variability. The relation between context and what kind of arguments contexts can license will be discussed in the talk.
Examples:
1. Ken-ga ame-ni hu-rare-ta.
   Ken-nom rain-dat descend-pass-past.
   Lit. ‘Ken, had it rain upon him.’ (Int. Ken was affected by the fact that it rained.)

   Ken-nom Naomi-dat run-pass-past.
   Int. ‘Ken was affected by the fact that Naomi ran.’

   Ken-nom Naomi-dat kick-pass-past
   Int. ‘Ken was kicked by Naomi.’ (Active: Naomi-nom Ken-acc kick-past.)

4. ame-ga hut-ta.
   Rain-nom descend-past.
   ‘Rain descended.’

5. Naomi-ga hashi-ta.
   Naomi-nom run-past
   ‘Naomi ran.’

6. Ken and Naomi were playing tag in the park. Ken was it. Naomi ran away from him when he was about to catch her.

7. Ken lives on the first floor, and Naomi lives on the 2nd floor. Ken cannot sleep every night because Naomi’s footsteps were too noisy. And today also…

8. Ken and Naomi raced to school by ‘walking’. Ken told Naomi explicitly that she was not allowed to run. Nevertheless, Naomi ran and arrived at school earlier than Ken.

    Ken-nom Naomi-dat escape-rare-past
    ‘Ken was escaped from by Naomi.’

    Active: Naomi-ga Ken-kara nige-ta.
    Naomi-nom Ken-from escape-past
    ‘Naomi escaped from Ken.’

      Finally rain-nom {Ken/we/Tokyo}-dat descend-past.
      ‘Finally rain descended upon {Ken/we/Tokyo}.

      Active: {Ken/wareware/Tokyo}-ga ame-ni hu-rare-ta.
      Ken/we/Tokyo-nom rain-dat descend-past.
      ‘{Ken/we/Tokyo} had it rain on {him/us/it}’

Selected References:
   Explorations in Linguistics: Papers in honor of Kazuko Inoue, Kenkyusha, Tokyo.