

Main Verb Byproducts in Gapless Relative Clauses in Korean and Japanese

ABSTRACT

Some languages, particularly these in the Eurasian region, are known to have an unorthodox type of relative clause construction that lacks a syntactic gap relatable to the head noun. Korean and Japanese are languages that allow such an occurrence of “gapless relative clauses.” Matsumoto (1997 and elsewhere) proposes a single term, Noun-Modifying Constructions (NMC), for different types of constructions: (i) Relative clause, (ii) Noun-complement clause, and (iii) the so-called ‘Gapless Relative Clause.’ On the surface, in Modern Japanese, all three NMCs are completely lacking a morphological mechanism that demarcates syntactically a subordinate clause from its head noun.

On the basis of the Case Frame Semantics (Fillmore 1997), Matsumoto further argues that Japanese NMC may be better analyzed in terms of semantics and pragmatics, independent from syntax. NMCs are classified into three distinct types in terms of the role of constituents (the embed relative clause and its head) in interpretation: Noun-host type, Clause-host type, and Head/Clause type. In this framework, the gapless relative construction is subject to the Head/Clause type interpretation. The semantic/pragmatic interpretation relies on source information such as: (a) case roles of the predicate of the clause, (b) worldview, (c) encyclopedic knowledge associated with the Head-noun, (d) aspects of the predicating verb of the Clause, (e) elements that help semantic roles, and (f) existing discourse contexts.

In this paper I propose an alternative to Matsumoto’s interpretive approach to the noun-modifying constructions, the gapless relative clause, in particular.

First, the seemingly missing gap in the “gapless relative clause” may be recovered as being a secondary event resulting from the main verb of the relative clause. Thus, a Japanese gapless relative clause like *sakana-o yakuku nioi* (its literary translation ‘the smell that John grills fish’ is, needless to say, ungrammatical.) may be a derivative from a normal relative clause: ‘the smell that (gap) emanates as John grills fish’ via partial ellipsis. The syntactic link is established indirectly between the head and the secondary (epiphenomenal) byproduct of the verb in the embedded clause. Any verb that produces such an epiphenomenal byproduct may be targeted for generating a gapless relative clause construction. Good candidates of the predicating verb of a gapless relative clause (items in the parentheses are resulting byproducts) are: a deer walking on the snow (footprints); John’s yahooping in a valley (echo); an airplane flying at a high altitude (jet-trail); a car running over a puddle (splash); a train passing by (roaring sound); the knight wounded in duel (a scar on his face); one’s translation work (money); Eliz’s playing piano (Chopin’s sonata); John sawing a log (saw-dust); burning tires (smell); John’s saving (interest); horrendous tornado passing (ruins); and the like.

Secondly, the hypothesis based on the epiphenomenal sub-event can make predictions and can generate examples of gapless relative clauses for testing. The critical shortcoming in Matsumoto's semantic/pragmatic account is that the theory provides no working hypothesis and therefore there is no way to produce possible examples of gapless relative clauses that in turn allow us to probe the validity of the hypothesis itself. In fact, Matsumoto's semantic/pragmatic approach can only rely on a limited amount of existing data from written texts, mass-media material, or anecdotal personal remarks.

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