

Nominative Objects in Sentences with *-te iru* in Japanese

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1. Introduction

In Japanese, when transitive verbs have intransitive (unaccusative) counterparts, they take morphologically different forms, as shown in the following examples.

(1) a. Taroo-ga doa-o ak-eru.

Taroo-NOM door-ACC open

‘Taro opens the door.’

b. Doa-ga ak-u.

door-NOM open

‘The door opens.’

(1a) is a transitive sentence and the verbal form is *ak-eru* ‘open’.

(1b) is an intransitive (unaccusative) counterpart of (1a) and the verb takes the form *ak-u* ‘open’. In this way, transitive verbs and their intransitive counterparts take different morphological forms in Japanese. This contrasts with the situation in English, where transitive verbs and their intransitive counterparts can take the same form, as illustrated in (2).

(2) a. Taro opens the door.

b. The door opens.

(2a) is a transitive sentence and (2b) is its intransitive counterpart.

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The verbs in (2a,b) have the same form *open*. Thus, Japanese differs from English in this respect.

However, there are exceptional cases in Japanese where intransitive (unaccusative) verbs take the same morphological form as their transitive counterparts. Consider the following sentences.

(3) a. Taroo-ga ichigo-o utte-iru.

Taroo-NOM strawberries-ACC sell-be

‘Taro is selling strawberries.’

b. Ichigo-ga utte-iru.

strawberries-NOM sell-be

‘Strawberries are for sale.’

Some researchers point out that some Japanese speakers use the intransitive sentence in (3b). (3b) is used as an unaccusative sentence, like (1b) and (2b), and the transitive form in (3a) and the intransitive form in (3b) have the same verb *utte-iru* ‘sell-be’. Hence, the pattern in (3a,b) looks like that in (2) rather than that in (1).

In this paper, I will consider the nature of sentences like (3b). The organization of this paper is the following. In section 2, I will discuss three studies about sentences like (3b): Matahira (2001), Suzuki (2001), and Tagawa (2002). Next, in section 3, I will introduce my own research in Okamoto (2010) and give an explanation about the pattern in question. Section 4 shows some remaining puzzles with the pattern seen in (3b). Finally, I will sum up this paper in section 5.

2. Matahira (2001), Suzuki (2001), and Tagawa (2002)

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First, let us look at the following sentences in (4).

- (4) a. (Ano mise-de) ichigo-o utte-iru.
 that shop-at strawberries-ACC sell-be
 ‘They are selling strawberries (at that shop).’
- b. (Ano mise-de) ichigo-ga utte-iru.
 that shop-at strawberries-NOM sell-be
 ‘Strawberries are for sale (at that shop).’

The Japanese verb *uru* 'sell' is a transitive verb, so that the object *ichigo* 'strawberries' should have an accusative Case marker. (4a) has an accusative object and this sentence is grammatical. On the other hand, (4b) has a nominative object. Although this sentence should be ungrammatical, some people consider it to be grammatical. Some researchers consider this fact. I will show three studies by Matahira (2001), Suzuki (2001), and Tagawa (2002).

Matahira (2001) claims that the nominative object in the *V-te iru* construction is possible only with the verb *uru*. To support this claim, Matahira examines expressions like (4b) on the Internet. She looked for examples of the forms "NP-*ga utte-iru* (NP-NOM sell-be)" and "NP-*ga utte-ita* (NP-NOM sell-be-Past)" and found 104 examples of those forms. Matahira examines those 104 examples and determines that a common property of those expressions is stativity. Then, Matahira considers why the expressions in question are possible. According to Matahira, there are two reasons for this. The first reason has to do with a property of the verb *uru*. Consider the following example.

- (5) Taroo-wa Hanako-ni ichigo-o utta.
 Taro-TOP Hanako-to strawberries-ACC sold
 ‘Taro sold strawberries to Hanako.’

When the dative NP *Hanako* appears in the sentence, the verb *uru* in

(5) implies that Hanako purchased strawberries. Hence, the verb *uru* is basically used when the seller succeeds in having the thing he/she sells purchased. Then, look at the examples in (6).

- (6) a. Taroo-wa ichigo-o utta (shikashi dare-mo
Taro-TOP strawberries-ACC sold but anyone-mo
kaw-anakat-ta).
buy-not-Past
'Taro sold strawberries (but no one bought it).'
- b. Taroo-wa ichigo-o utte-iru (shikashi dare-mo
Taro-TOP strawberries-ACC sell-be but anyone-mo
kaw-anakat-ta).
buy-not-Past
'Taro is selling strawberries (but no one bought it).'

(6) does not imply the purchase of strawberries, so that the verb *uru* is also used when the purchase is not accomplished. The intransitive form *ur-eru* 'sell', unlike the transitive form *uru*, cannot be used when no one buys strawberries, because the intransitive verb *ur-eru* implies the purchase of strawberries. This is shown in (7).

- (7) a. Ichigo-ga ur-eta.
strawberries-NOM sell
'Strawberries sold.'
- b. Ichigo-ga ur-ete-iru.
strawberries-NOM sell-be
'Strawberries is selling.'

The form of the verbs in (7) is *ur-eru* and (7) implies the purchase of strawberries. If we want to use an intransitive form in the sentence which does not imply the purchase of strawberries, we cannot use the verb *ur-eru*. Hence, we use the expression *ichigo-ga utte-iru*

'strawberries are for sale' in (4b).

The second reason is the possibility that arises from the existence of the Agent. To see this, let us consider the following example.

- (8) Ichigo-o utte-iru.
strawberries-ACC sell-be
'(lit.) Someone sells strawberries.'

In Japanese, the Agent argument can be missing, as in the sentence in (8). However, as pointed out by Inoue (1976), the sentence in (8) implies the existence of the Agent. Next, consider the following example.

- (9) Kagi-ga kakatte-iru.
key-NOM lock-be
'(lit.) The door is a locked state.'

Teramura (1984) suggests that we are able to use the intransitive form *-te iru* 'be' when the situation is a natural state. In (9), the locked situation is a natural state, so that the *-te iru* appears. If Inoue's suggestion is correct, we do not use the sentence in (8) to show the existence of goods without implying the existence of the Agent. If we only convey the existence of goods, we have to use expressions like (9) and the sentence in (9) looks like the sentence in (4b). Hence, Matahira concludes that some people use expressions like (4b) for these two reasons.

Tagawa (2002) also examines the expressions in question. He gives a descriptive analysis of the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form as in (4b). His analysis is shown in (10).

- (10) The expressions in question focus on the stativity of an object
and show that the object exists in a certain state.

Also, he suggests that the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form is derived from

two processes. First of all, the *-te iru* 'be' is added to the verb and the sentence becomes a stative sentence. Next, an Agent is deleted in the syntactic structure and the object exists in the subject position. These processes derive the expressions in question. Tagawa calls these processes a change from a transitive to a quasi-intransitive. Tagawa also considers the reason for the phenomenon. To do this, Tagawa shows Suzuki's (2001) research. Suzuki examines on the Internet whether the expressions in question exist or not. She picks up two verbal types—a placement-type and a production-type—from Hayatsu's (1989) verbal classification because she considers that these two verbal types are likely to fit expressions like (4b). The result of her research is shown below.¹

Table 1: Result of Suzuki's (2001) research

placement-type	ratio	production-type	ratio
<i>oku</i> 'put'	64%	<i>kaku</i> 'write'	3%
<i>haru</i> 'put up'	58%	<i>kumu</i> 'set'	2%
<i>nuru</i> 'paint'	13%	<i>horu</i> 'dig'	3%

The ratio in Table 1 shows the ratio of the real number of NP(Theme)-NOM transitive verb-*te iru* form to the total number of NP-NOM verb-*te iru* form. Table 1 shows that the ratio of the placement-type exceeds that of the production-type. Matahira claims that expressions like (4b) are restricted to the verb *uru*. However, Suzuki points out that some verbs other than *uru* permit such expressions. She suggests that verbs of the placement-type permit the expressions in question, as shown in Table 1.

On the basis of Suzuki's research, Tagawa considers an explanation of the appearance of the Theme-NOM V-*te iru* form. Tagawa considers the following sentences.

- (11) a. Taroo-wa ichijikan hon-o tsukue-ni oita.
 Taro-TOP one hour book-ACC table-DAT put
 ‘Taro put a book on the table for one hour.’
- b. Taroo-wa ichijikan ji-o kaita.
 Taro-TOP one hour letters-ACC wrote
 ‘Taro wrote letters for one hour.’
- c. Taroo-wa ichijikan ichigo-o utta.
 Taro-TOP one hour strawberries-ACC sold
 ‘Taro sold strawberries for one hour.’

The verb in (11a) is the placement-type, the verb in (11b) is the production-type, and the verb in (11c) is *uru*. The sentences in (11a-c) all have the adverb *ichijikan* ‘one hour’. Tagawa claims that the differences of the meaning among the three verbal types become clear when the adverb co-occurs. In the placement-type (11a), *ichijikan* means that Taro puts the book on the table and the state of that result continues for an hour. On the other hand, in the production-type (11b), *ichijikan* means that Taro’s activity of writing letters continues for an hour. Hence, the meaning of the verb in (11a) can be associated with a state resulting from an activity, but the verb in (11b) simply means an activity. According to Tagawa, when we use the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form, such sentences show stativity, as shown in (10). In the case of the production-type, the verb has the meaning of an activity, so that the existence of the Agent is indispensable. Hence, we cannot use expressions like (4b) with the production-type because the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form does not imply the existence of the Agent. On the other hand, the verb in the placement-type (11a) can mean a resulting state and this matches the description in (10). Hence, the placement-type verb

can be used for the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form. However, Tagawa suggests that the verb *uru* has the same meaning as (11b), namely, (11c) means that Taro's sale for strawberries continues for an hour.² If that meaning is correct, we would not use the verb *uru* in the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form like the production-type in (11b). Tagawa gives an explanation of this fact. We can use the verb *utte-iru* 'sell-be' when a price tag hangs on the goods. In this case, the sentence does not imply the existence of the Agent. Hence, the verb *uru* also meets the condition on the use of the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form.

Matahira (2001), Suzuki (2001), and Tagawa (2002) observe that expressions like (4b) are possible in Japanese. Matahira considers that such expressions are restricted to the verb *uru* and explains why they exist in Japanese. However, Suzuki shows another verbal type with the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form. On the basis of Suzuki's research, Tagawa gives an explanation of the expressions in question. Matahira and Tagawa consider that the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* has the property of stativity. I agree with this point of their claim. However, in my own investigation, I found quite a low percentage of the placement-type in the Theme-NOM *V-te iru*. In the next section, I will turn to the result of this investigation in Okamoto (2010).

3. The verbal types appearing in the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form

In Okamoto (2010), I investigate whether the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form is possible or not. I use a questionnaire because the Internet often contains ungrammatical sentences and so research based on the Internet is rather unreliable. I examine whether the verbs *uru*

'sell', *yaru* 'do', *oku* 'put', or *haru* 'put up' can appear in the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form or not. The examples are shown below.

- (12) a. Posutaa-ga hatte-iru.
posters-NOM put up-be
'Posters are put up.'
- b. Jyuusu-ga utte-iru.
canned juices-NOM sell-be
'Canned juices are for sale.'
- c. Kooji-ga yatte-iru.
construction-NOM do-be
'(lit.) (Someone) is constructing (something).'
- d. Jitensya-ga oite-iru.
bicycles-NOM place-be
'Bicycles are placed.'
- e. Seeru-ga yatte-iru.
sale-NOM hold-be
'(lit.) (That shop) is having a sale.'
- f. Eiga-ga jyooei-site-iru.
movies-NOM show-do-be
'Movies are showing.'
- g. Ringo-ga utte-iru.
apples-NOM sell-be
'Apples are for sale.'
- h. Memo-ga hatte-iru.
note-NOM put up-be
'The note is put up.'

- i. *Doraemon-ga* *yatte-iru*.
 doraemon-NOM broadcast-be
 ‘(lit.) "Doraemon" is broadcast (on television).’
- j. *Hana-ga* *kazatte-iru*.
 flowers-NOM display-be
 ‘(lit.) (The room) is displayed with flowers.’

I did not include examples of production-type verbs, which show a low acceptance rate in Suzuki's (2001) research. The result of my research is shown below.³

Table 2 : Result of the questionnaire

verbal class	ratio of the Theme-NOM <i>V-te iru</i>
<i>haru</i> 'put up' (12a)	5%
<i>uru</i> 'sell' (12b)	50%
<i>yaru</i> 'make' (12c)	16%
<i>oku</i> 'place' (12d)	0%
<i>yaru</i> 'hold' (12e)	27%
<i>jyooei-suru</i> 'show' (12f)	25%
<i>uru</i> 'sell' (12g)	50%
<i>haru</i> 'put up' (12h)	5%
<i>yaru</i> 'broadcast' (12i)	80%
<i>kazaru</i> 'display' (12j)	5%

The left column in Table 2 shows the verbs used in the examples. The verb *yaru* has three different meanings; *okonau* 'do', *kaisai-suru* 'hold', and *housou-suru* 'broadcast'. The right column shows percentages of the acceptance of the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form. The first remarkable point in Table 2 is the difference between the percentage of the verb *uru* 'sell' and the percentages of the placement-type verbs *haru* 'put up' and *oku* 'place'. The verb *uru* has 50%. In contrast, the verb *haru* has 5% and the verb *oku* has 0%.

This result is incompatible with that of Suzuki's (2001) research. The second remarkable point is that the verb *youtu* 'broadcast' has the highest percentage of all the verbs.

I would like to consider why some sentences are accepted by many speakers while others are not. Let us consider the representative cases repeated in (13).

(13) a. Ringo-ga utte-iru.

apples-NOM sell-be

'Apples are for sale.'

b. *Doraemon*-ga yatte-iru.

doraemon-NOM broadcast-be

'(lit.) "Doraemon" is broadcast (on television).'

c. Posutaa-ga hatte-iru.

posters-NOM put up-be

'Posters are put up.'

d. Jitensya-ga oite-iru.

bicycles-NOM place-be

'Bicycles are placed.'

(13a) and (13b) are sentences with a high acceptance rate and (13c) and (13d) are those with a low acceptance rate. Why are the two groups different in this way? First, I want to consider the low percentage of the second group. The verbs *haru* and *oku* can occur with *-te aru* 'be', which means the state of a result. Let us look at the following sentences.

(14) a. Posutaa-ga hatte-aru.

posters-NOM put up-be

'Posters are put up.'

b. Jitensya-ga oite-aru.

bicycles-NOM place-be

‘Bicycles are placed.’

The sentences in (14a,b) both describe a duration of the state resulting from the action denoted by the verb. This is the same as the meaning that the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form conveys. Since (14a,b) are grammatical, we do not need to use the unfamiliar sentences in (13c,d) to express the same meaning. In fact, the same people who selected the Theme-NOM *hatte-iru* ‘put up-be’ form also selected the Theme-NOM *hatte-aru* ‘put up-be’ form. The concrete examples I used in the questionnaire are given in (15).

(15) Iroiro-na posutaa-ga hatte [aru / iru].

several posters-NOM put up be be

‘Several posters are put up.’

[*aru/iru*] in (15) shows that the subjects can choose between the two options. The result is that 5 % of the subjects selected both *aru* ‘be’ and *iru* ‘be’. This suggests that the choice of the verb *haru* and *oku* is not accepted in the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form because the verbs *haru* and *oku* have a *-te aru* form. On the other hand, the verb *uru* in (13a) and *yaru* in (13b) do not have the *-te aru* form meaning that the action is done and the state of the result continues. Hence, as pointed out by Matahira (2001) and Tagawa (2002), we have no choice but to use the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form. If this explanation is correct, the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form is a stative sentence. Kuno (1973) suggests that stative sentences prefer to have nominative objects. This is why a nominative object appears in the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form.

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We have given an explanation of the appearance of the Theme-

NOM *V-te iru* form. However, we have not settled the issue of why transitive verbs and intransitive verbs have the same forms, as in *utte-iru* and *yatte-iru*, as pointed out in Introduction. I will take up this point in the next section.

4. Some remaining puzzles with the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form

As shown in Introduction, transitive forms and intransitive forms are usually different in Japanese. I repeat the sentences in (1) in (16).

(16) a. Taroo-ga doa-o ak-eru.

Taroo-NOM door-ACC open

'Taro opens the door.'

b. Doa-ga ak-u.

door-NOM open

'The door opens.'

The verb in (16a) has the transitive form *ak-eru* 'open' and the verb in (16b) has the intransitive form *ak-u* 'open'. Basically, the form of the verb changes between the transitive and the intransitive. However, the expressions in question are exceptional. Consider the following examples.

(17) a. Taroo-ga ichigo-o utte-iru.

Taroo-NOM strawberries-ACC sell-be

'Taro sells strawberries.'

b. Ichigo-ga utte-iru.

strawberries-NOM sell-be

'Strawberries are for sale.'

The sentence in (17a) is a transitive sentence and the verb is transitive. Then, is the sentence in (17b) a transitive sentence or an intransitive sentence? (17b) means that the state of a sale continues,

as in *strawberries are for sale*. This is an unaccusative sentence, where a Theme becomes a subject, as shown in (16b), and (17b) looks like (16b). Hence, (17b) is an intransitive sentence. In (17a,b), the transitive form and the intransitive form are the same. This is similar to the pattern seen in English, as in (18).

(18) a. Taro opens the door.

b. The door opens.

In (18), the transitive verb *open* and the intransitive verb *open* are the same. We should consider why the verbal forms in (17) are similar to the English verbal forms in (18) rather than the basic Japanese verbal forms in (16).

Also, we ought to consider why the pattern in (17) is restricted to particular verbs. The verb *uru* 'sell' and *yaru* 'broadcast' can take this pattern. In contrast, *haru* 'put up' and *oku* 'place' cannot. This fact must be explained. I want to consider these points in the future.

5. Summary

Some Japanese verbs can appear in the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form. Matahira (2001) considers that only the verb *uru* 'sell' can take this form. In contrast, Suzuki (2001) and Tagawa (2002) suggest that placement-type verbs and the verb *uru* can. However, my research has revealed that placement-type verbs do not take the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form. The reason for this seems to be the existence of the *-te aru* 'be' form. The verbs *haru* 'put up' and *oku* 'place' can occur with *-te aru*, so that we do not need to use the unfamiliar form *-te iru* 'be'. On the other hand, the verbs *uru* and *yaru* 'broadcast' do not occur with *-te aru*. Hence, these verbs can appear with the Theme-

NOM *V-te iru* form.

In this way, we can explain why some verbs can appear with the Theme-NOM *V-te iru* form. However, we cannot explain why this *V-te iru* form is used for both intransitive and transitive verbs. Basically, Japanese uses different morphological forms for transitive and intransitive verbs. But in the case of the *V-te iru* form in question, the intransitive and transitive verbs take the same form. This fact has to be left for future research.

Notes

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1 I do not show Suzuki's (2001) actual research in this paper. Table 1 is Tagawa's (2002) summary of Suzuki's research.

2 Tagawa considers that the meaning of the verb *uru* 'sell' in (11c) is an activity. However, the sentence in (11c) has another meaning: Taro puts strawberries on a shelf for sale and the resulting state continues. This is the state of the result. Hence, the verb *uru* in (11c) has the properties of both the production-type in (11a) and the placement-type in (11b).

3 In Okamoto (2010), I research a difference between the younger generation and the older generation. This paper does not relevant to the difference among two generations. Hence, Table 2 shows

the ratio of the younger generation and does not include the ratio of the older generation.

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