A semantic analysis of finite control in Japanese

Keywords: control, responsibility, de se attitude, finite control, formal/lexical semantics

‘Finite control’ in languages like Japanese and Korean (Hasegawa 1984/85, Uchibori 2000, Fujii 2006, 2016, Gamerschlag 2007), as in (1a) with kokoromiru (‘try’), is problematic since the distribution of PRO is standardly taken to be limited to infinitival clauses. Responding to this challenge, Fujii (2006, 2016) proposes that the non-past tense in (1a) is in effect ‘defective’ as it does not freely alternate with the past tense, and thus exceptionally licenses obligatory control in the embedded clause. However, obligatory control verbs like kōkai-suru (‘regret’) that allow for tense alternation (= (2)) are problematic for this analysis.

In view of the difficulties with a syntactic approach, we propose a semantic alternative to finite control in koto clauses. Specifically, we claim that the empty subject in (1) is just a zero pronoun (pro), and that its obligatory control status in (1a) (as vs. (1b)) is determined solely on the basis of the meaning of the higher verb. Building on Akuzawa and Wang (2018), we classify ‘control’ verbs taking koto clauses into six classes in (3). The key challenge for a semantic account then is that these classes appear to have nothing in common (note that (3d) is factive, (3b,c,e) are non-factive and (3a) is implicative). For example, the notion of ‘responsibility’ (= (4), Farkas 1988) seems relevant for some classes (e.g. (3b,c,e)), but it is not sufficiently general for characterizing all the classes in (3). Problematic cases include sippai-suru (‘fail’) and kōkai-suru (‘regret’)--for these verbs, there is no obvious sense in which the embedded event is brought about intentionally by the controller. In our account, we combine a generalized notion of responsibility with another idea form the literature, namely, that control obligatorily involves de se attitudes (Chierchia 1989), as in (5). The key idea here is that a control predicate introduces a (possibly hypothetical) volitional event that stands in some kind of causal relation to the embedded event. The (hidden) volitionality (5a) and the de se property (5b) can be tested by adverbial phrases hukakōryoku-de (‘inevitably’) (6) and sore-to sirazu-ni (‘unkowingly’) (7) (in (6) and (7), a. is control and b. is non-control).

We now illustrate our analysis with some key examples. The non-implicative verb kokoromiru (‘try’) presupposes (8a), namely, that the controller realizes that his/her engaging in some volitional event V is a necessary condition for the realization of P. The verb then entails that c actually engages in V (8b). By contrast, the implicative seikō-suru (‘succeed’) and sippai-suru (‘fail’) entail P and ¬P respectively (9/10b), due to their implicative nature, but they both additionally presuppose that c has tried P (9/10a). In other words, the precondition for succeeding or failing is trying. Note that this nicely reconciles the negative implicative nature of sippai-suru with the notion of responsibility. There is after all a sense in which c is ‘responsible’ for P, since s/he tried to bring about it. The similarly problematic kōkai-suru (‘regret’) turns out to be unproblematic too, once we tease apart its presupposition and assertion. Kōkai-suru presupposes P and entails something about the mental state of c. Here, the key guiding intuition is that one can only regret about something that one could have prevented from happening. More formally, the verb entails that in the desiderative alternatives (or modal base) for c, c engages in volitional event V, which would have been a necessary condition for preventing P (11b) (the factive presupposition P(c) is a logical consequences of the two conjuncts in (11a)). Here the non-engagement in V was the cause of P, so, c doesn’t bring about P, but c is still ‘responsible’ for P in the sense that s/he didn’t take the necessary preventive measures. To summarize, all the verbs in (3) share a certain type of presupposition: a causal relation between P and V. We claim that this is the necessary and sufficient condition for inducing obligatory control in koto clauses.
1. a. Joni-wa [i\_i\_j\_] kinko-o ake-{ru/ta} koto]-o kokoromi-ta (control)
   J-TOP safe-ACC open-{non.PST/PST} NC-ACC try-PST
   'Jon tried to open the safe.'
   b. Joni-wa [i\_i\_j\_] kinko-o ake-{ru/ta} koto]-o negat-ta (non-control)
   J-TOP safe-ACC open-{non.PST/PST} NC-ACC hope-PST
   int: 'Jon hoped to open the safe.'

2. Joni-wa [i\_i\_j\_] kēsatukan-dea-{ru/ta} koto]-o kōkai-si-ta
   J-TOP policeman-COP-non.PST/PST NC-ACC regret-PST
   'John regretted that he is/was a policeman.'

3. a. imputative: shippai-suru (fail), seikō-suru (success), okotaru (neglect)
   b. non-imputative: kokoromiru (try), kitaímiru (expect), kessin-suru (determine)
   c. directive: meiziru (order), osiri (teach), mitomeru (permit), motomeru (ask)
   d. factive: kōkai-suru (regret), hansē-suru (reflect on)
   e. commissive: hyoomei-suru (declare), tikau (vow)
   f. phasal: hazimeru (begin), oeru (finish), torikakaru (set about)

4. RESP (i, s) ... just in case [situation] s is the result of some act performed by
   [individual] i with the intention of bringing s about (Farkas 1988: 36, emphasis added)

5. A control predicate minimally involves:
   a. some (possibly counterfactual) volitional event V
   b. a de se proposition P of embedded clause
   c. some kind of causal relation between V and P

6. Jon-ga [i\_i\_j\_] hukakōryoku-de kegā-si-ta koto]-o {a.*kōkai-si/b.zannen-ni omot]-ta.
   J-NOM inevitably be injured-PST NC-ACC regret/ feel sorry-PST
   int: 'John regretted that he was inevitably injured.'

   J-NOM unknowingly take an exam-non.PST NC-ACC/DAT determine/object-PST
   int: 'John unknowingly determined/objected to take an exam.' (Context for b.: Amnestic
   John hears from his father that his son is going to take the entrance exam of Tokyo U.
   He objects to that idea, without realizing that his father’s son is none other than himself.)

8. a. presupposition: [P(c)→V(c)]∈MB_{c,\text{epst}}       b. assertion: V(c)
9. a. presupposition: [P(c)→V(c)]∈MB_{c,\text{epst}} ∧ V(c)       b. assertion: P (c)
10. a. presupposition: [P(c)→V(c)]∈MB_{c,\text{epst}} ∧ V(c)       b. assertion: ¬P (c)
11. a. presupposition: [¬P(c)→V(c)] ∧ ¬V(c)       b. assertion: V(c)∈MB_{c,\text{desider}}

Genshoo-niokeru Imi-no Yakuwari (The Role of Semantic Factors in Control Phenomena in
Anaphora and Attitudes de se. In Semantics and Contextual Expressions, 1-31. Farkas, D.
aspects of complement control in Korean. ZAS Papers in Linguistics 47, 81-123. Hasegawa,