

A Note on the Rheme and Rhematization

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I. According to the FSP theory,⁽¹⁾ each element in a linguistic field (i.e. a sentence etc.) carries a specific degree of communicative dynamism (CD).⁽²⁾ The distribution of CD is basically regular ; the element carrying the lowest degree of CD (theme=T) is put first, the one carrying the highest degree of CD (rheme=R) last, and the intermediate element (transition=t) between T and R. The type of CD distribution is, therefore, shown by the sequence T-t-R.⁽³⁾ This sequence seems to agree with the character of human apprehension so naturally that it can be called 'basic,' and J. Firbas, one of the leading theorists in this field, supposes that the tendency towards the basic distribution of CD belongs to the linguistic universals, at least in Indo-European languages.⁽⁴⁾

On the whole this supposition will hold good, but, for some reason or other, the actual distribution of CD in a language is often decided against the basic one. In other words, each natural language has its own standard distribution of CD, which does not always coincide with the basic distribution.

This problem has been examined to some extent in my previous papers,⁽⁵⁾ which present a tentative hypothesis that the standard⁽⁶⁾ distribution of CD in Japanese is not T-t-R, but T-R-t. In this note a few more things are to be discussed on the hypothesis, especially on the position of rheme.

II. As mentioned above, the distribution of CD presupposes the distributional fields, the standard one of which must be a sentence, or the so-called independent clause. The following examples⁽⁷⁾ will show the points clearly.

(1) He ^T had ^{t₁} become ^{t₂} *almost a myth*. ^R

(2) Er ^T war ^{t₁} *fast zur Mythe* ^R geworden. ^{t₂}

(3) Stal se z něho ^t ^T *takřka* ^R *mythus*.

lit. he became self of him almost myth

(4) Kare-wa ^T *hotondo shinwa(-teki)-ni* ^R ^t *natte-ita.*⁽⁸⁾

lit. he almost myth(-like)-to become-had

Each is thought to be the standard type in the respective language. To interpret each from the viewpoint of CD distribution, (1) consists of T-t₁-t₂-R, (2) T-t₁-R-t₂, (3) t-T-R, and (4) T-R-t, respectively.

At first sight there seems to be no rule governing these sequences, but a remarkable difference exists between the former three and the last. Because in (1), (2) and (3), t-elements occur before R, but in (4) t does not stand before R.⁽⁹⁾ Moreover, in (2), the last element t₂ is a past participle, which stands in a grammatically marked position to constitute a kind of compound tense (past perfect). If the tense in (2) were not compound, the distribution would be T-t-R (e.g. Er wurde fast zur Mythe). So (2) is in a sense exceptional, and we can suppose that in (1), (2) and (3), the standard position of R will be the end of a sentence. But in (4) R stands before the last t-element. Many examples like (4) will tell us the same, and it is expected to be one of the characteristics of CD distribution in Japanese.

Then let us go to one of the subfields of distribution of CD, i. e. a dependent clause.⁽¹⁰⁾

(5) [The poetry of the English home exists at the expense of the English street]

^T ^t ^R
which is *devoid of poetry*.

(6) [Die Poesie des englischen Heims ist damit bezahlt,] daß die englische Straße ^T

^R ^t
posielos ist.

(7) [Poesie anglického domova je zaplacená tím,] že anglická ulice ^T ^t ^R je *bez poesie*.

(8) [Igisuru-no katei-no shijoo-wa] igirisu-no gairo-ni ^T ^R ^t *shijoo-ga kakete* -iru⁽¹¹⁾
koto-de [aganawa-rete-iru.]

lit. England's home's poetry England's street-in poetry devoid-is that-with compensated-is

In (5) the distribution of CD is T-t-R, in (6) T-R-t, in (7) T-t-R, and in (8) T-R-t. Clearly (5) and (7) have the same order, which is the basic one. (6) agrees with (8), but there is a covert or potential difference between them, just as between (2) and (4). That is, if (6) is changed into an independent clause, the sequence will be basically T-t-R (i.e. Die englische Straße ist poesielos), while (8) has, even if changed into an independent clause, the unchangeable distribution T-R-t (i.e. Igrisu-no gairo-wa⁽¹²⁾ shijooni kakete-iru). With the rigid grammatical rules which demand that t should be put last, (6) is a kind of restricted construction, or a marked structure in German.⁽¹³⁾ On the contrary, (8) is not marked, but standard, in Japanese.

Moreover, it should be noted that the whole distributional fields including (5), (6) and (7), or the entire sentences including the bracketed parts, have the T-t-R distribution, but the sentence including (8) has the T-R-t type.⁽¹⁴⁾ Thus we can observe that the type of standard distribution tends to be kept in the subfields, without any interference of grammatical rules.

III. The standard distribution implies the position of rheme, but to make it surer, we can rely on the examination of some means of rhematization.⁽¹⁵⁾ Consider the following.

(9) John flew to Tokyo yesterday.

(10) Jan letěl včera do Tokia.

(11) Jon-wa kinoo Tookyoo-e ton-da.

lit. John yesterday Tokyo-to flew

Each of (9), (10) and (11) consists of four parts. Without changing the position, each part can be rhematized by some prosodical means (i.e. to be given a special stress, or some kind of intonation pattern etc.).⁽¹⁶⁾ Of this means it will be needless to say more.

With the prosodical means, the word order can function as the rhematizing device. For example, in (9) with the standard word order, if prosodically neutral or unmarked, R will be 'to Tokyo' by reason of semantics, but it will be more obvious because of the marked word order in (12).

(12) John flew yesterday to Tokyo.

But for the time-setting 'yesterday', the distribution is evidently T-t-R, and this tendency is thought to be overall in English.

In Czech, the word order can be the most powerful means of rhematization, and the rheme stands almost invariably in the end position. The word order in Czech has the flexibility supported by its morphological structure and a strong inclination for the T-t-R distribution.⁽¹⁷⁾

(13) Včera do Tokia letěl Jan.

(14) Jan letěl do Tokia včera, etc.

In Japanese, it differs a little. In (11), if prosodically unmarked,⁽¹⁸⁾ R will be 'Tookyoo-e', and in (15) kinoo will be R.

(15) Jon-wa Tookyoo-e kinoo ton-da.

(16) has something problematic, because the particle '-wa' is usually the theme marker,⁽¹⁹⁾ but the word order suggests that (16) is a marked structure in Japanese⁽²⁰⁾ and that 'Jon-wa' is almost rhematic.

(16) Kinoo Tookyoo-e Jon-wa ton-da.

To return to English, except the verb part,⁽²¹⁾ the so-called split sentence (It is that.....) can be used as one of the devices.

(17) It was *John* that flew to Tokyo yesterday.

- (18) It was *to Tokyo* that John flew yesterday.
 (19) It was *yesterday* that John flew to Tokyo.

Of course they have the same distribution of CD (T₁-t-R-T₂), and R is put in the syntactically marked position. There is no possibility to miss it.

Also in Japanese we can employ a similar device as the following and the italicized parts are R's.

- (20) Kinoo Tookyoo-e ton-da-no-wa *Jon* da.⁽²²⁾
 lit. yesterday Tookyoo-to flew-that John is
 (21) Jon-ga⁽²³⁾ kinoo ton-da-no-wa *Tookyoo(-e)* da.
 (22) Jon-ga Tookyoo-e ton-da-no-wa *kinoo* da.

To put it into a more general way, (20), (21) and (22) have the same structure X-wa-Y-da, and the element in the position of Y is to be the rheme. The distribution of CD in it is T-R-t,⁽²⁴⁾ but the structure is somewhat analogous to the English split sentence.

Again in English, an indefinite article is sometimes used to mark the rheme, as in (23).

- (23) Once upon a time there was *a* king. (*The* king was old...)

Undoubtedly the word 'king' is the rhematic element. It is marked by the article 'a' in (23), which has the typical distribution of CD, T-t-R.

In Japanese the particle '-ga' can take the similar role.

- (24) Mukashi oo-sama-*ga* i-mashi-ta. (Oo-sama-*wa* toshiyori deshi-ta...)
 lit. long ago king was (king old man was...)

In (24) R is marked by '-ga' and the distribution of CD is T-R-t.

With the same use of '-ga', we can rewrite (20), (21) and (22) into the following.

(25) *Jon-ga* kinoo Tookyoo-e ton-da hito da. (hito=person)

(26) *Tookyoo-ga* Jon-no kinoo ton-da tokoro da. (tokoro=place)

(27) *Kinoo-ga* Jon-no Tookyoo-e ton-da hi da. (hi=day)

From the rhematic viewpoint, (20) is equal to (25), (21) to (26), and (22) to (27), respectively. Therefore the particle '-ga' is to be regarded as a rheme marker.

If the above observation is correct, we can change the structure X-wa-Y-da into Y-ga-X-da to show that Y is the rheme. Among the uses of some other words such as 'sae' (even), 'dake' (only) etc., this is one of the morphological means of rhematization in Japanese. In this case, however, the distribution of CD is R-T-t, which is a marked or deviated one in the language.⁽²⁵⁾

As to the last element, the 'da' form is used only in the colloquial style. In some cases this form may give the impression of impoliteness, and more polite or honorific forms, such as 'desu,' 'de-go-zai-masu' etc., are widely employed, though they semantically contribute almost nothing, only to cause a certain emotive effect. In fact, the last element ('da' etc.) can be eliminated and the X-wa-Y (i.e. T-R) type does appear. This seeming two-word sentence, X-wa-Y (or Y-ga-X), occurs in everyday speech so often that we can regard it as one of the typical structures in Japanese. At least this form is completely acceptable in Japanese. But most native speakers of Japanese will take it as an elliptical (i. e. somewhat ungrammatical), or rude, or at best metaphoric,⁽²⁶⁾ form. Therefore it is safe to say that in Japanese there is a strong tendency to conclude a sentence with a t-element.

The above fact seems to have something to do with the theory of a famous Japanese linguist, the late M. Tokieda,⁽²⁷⁾ who called the Japanese sentence structure 'ireko'⁽²⁸⁾-gata (the 'nest of boxes' type). It means that T and t, as a larger box, stow away R, a smaller box, and the t-element stands in the end position to close the statement. If this analysis is valid, it will definitely reveal that the Japanese are very fond of the T-R-t type of CD distribution.

The fondness may be seen in the larger distributional fields, such as a paragraph, chap-

ter, whole article and even a book etc., and give some remarkable characteristics to the Japanese way of communication.

IV. In general, the T-R-t distribution is expected to produce a communicatively self-contained structure, which tends to give a kind of centripetal force and reduce the communicative dynamism of the whole.⁽²⁹⁾ In other words, R is embedded in the middle of the distributional field and difficult to be located. This might make the communicative line in Japanese less of a line than a winding chain as I pointed out elsewhere,⁽³⁰⁾ or at any rate give a strange impression to speakers of other languages, especially to Indo-Europeans, whose languages may have basically the T-t-R type of distribution. Moreover, the extremely high dependency of the Japanese language on the context often results in the omission of T, which leads to the formation of the R-t sequence, something like a mirror structure to the T-t-R type. This seems to be of some significance.

For example, a Japanese woman physicist, who has long studied in Paris, writes that her argumentation in her papers seems to move the contrary to that of Europeans, and wonders if this is due to the differences in grammatical structures between Japanese and French, one of the Indo-European languages.⁽³¹⁾

Also a Japanese professor of French tells almost the same thing from his own experience. According to him, in a communication act, the Japanese start *for* the conclusion, while the Frenchmen start *from* the conclusion. He gives the illustration of the difference, as in Fig. i and ii.⁽³²⁾

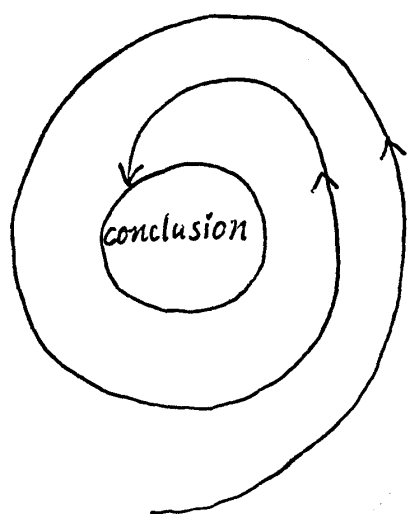


Fig. i Japanese

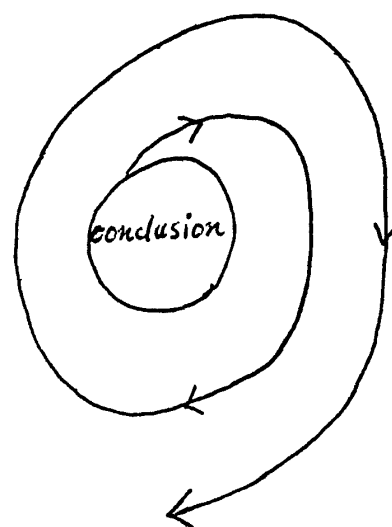


Fig. ii French

These observations may be too simple, or implicit, and at present it cannot be told whether it is correct or not, though I believe that it would be largely due to the difference in the distribution of CD between Japanese and French.

More explicit and convincing explanation is yet to be given by the FSP theory, which is certainly to have a very wide effective range.

Notes

- (1) FSP is the short for 'Functional Sentence Perspective,' the original term of which is 'aktuální členění větné' used by V. Mathesius. The content or scope of the theory can be examined comprehensively in the following works:
 - a. Daneš, F. (ed.) *Papers on Functional Sentence Perspective* Prague 1974
 - b. Firbas, J. and Golková, E. *An Analytical Bibliography of Czechoslovak Studies in Functional Sentence Perspective* Brno 1976
- (2) A degree of CD means the extent to which the element contributes towards the development of communication. Cf. Firbas, J. "On the Concept of Communicative Dynamism in the Theory of Functional Sentence Perspective" *Sborník prací filosofické fakulty brněnské univerzity* Brno 1971 pp. 135-44
- (3) Each part of the tripartite structure may be analyzed further into its own central element (theme proper, transition proper and rheme proper) and the rest.
- (4) Personal communication. Also he points out that the slavonic languages have a very strong tendency towards the basic distribution of CD and that Javanese could serve as an example of a non-slavonic one. (August 1975)
- (5) Iijima, I. a. "Bun-yooso-no hairitsu-ni kansuru ichi koosatsu" (On the arrangement of sentential elements) *Atomi-gakuen Joshi-daigaku Kiyoo* No.7 1974 pp. 1-8
 - b. "The Basic Distribution of Communicative Dynamism in Japanese" *Ibid.* No.8 1975 pp. 1-6
- (6) I prefer the adjective 'standard' instead of 'basic' which I used before, to avoid the confusion in terminology.
- (7) For comparison they are taken from the following (but the order is changed and the example in Japanese is added by me).

Firbas, J. "Thoughts on the Communicative Function of the Verb in English, German and Czech" *Brno Studies in English* Praha 1959 pp. 39-68
- (8) The sentences with the different word order (Hotondo shinwa-teki-ni kare-wa natte-ita etc.) are possible, but they are marked ones in Japanese.
- (9) In fact, the T-t-R construction (Kare-wa natte-ita, hotondo shinwa-teki-ni) is possible, but perhaps most native speakers of Japanese think that this is a highly deviated or very strongly

marked one.

- (10) Cf. Note (7). The other subfields (an attributinal construction etc.) are omitted here, to simplify the matter.
- (11) To change the positions of the particles '-ni' and '-ga' (i.e. gairo-ga shijoo-ni) is possible, and in such a case, gairo will be somewhat rhematic as explained in III. of this note.
- (12) The particle '-wa' used in this position is unmarked and can be called a theme marker, though the uses can be further classified. Cf. Kuno, S. *Nihon-Bunpoo Kenkyuu* (Studies in Japanese grammar) Tokyo 1973.
- (13) From the viewpoint of CD distribution, at least in this field—in an infinitive phrase, too, the similar word order is seen. e.g. ein Buch (zu) haben = hon-o motsu (koto) --- lit. book have (to) —, German seems to have common characteristics with Japanese. If so, apart from the genetic relations, a new kind of typology, or rather characterology, would be expected on the basis of the FSP theory. Cf. Mathesius, V. "On Linguistic Characterology with Illustrations from Modern English" Vachek, J. (ed.) *A Prague School Reader in Linguistics* Bloomington and London 1964 pp. 59-67
- (14) Of course R-T-t, a marked structure in Japanese, is possible.
- (15) i.e. To make a linguistic element the rheme, the bearer of the highest degree of CD in the field.
- (16) In general the heaviest stress will fall on the rheme.
- (17) The problems of word order have been systematically studied in the FSP theory. e.g. Mathesius, V. *Čeština a obecný jazykozpyt* (The Czech language and general linguistics) Praha 1947 pp. 327-59; Šmilauer, V. *Nauka o českém jazyku* (Science of the Czech language) Praha 1972 pp. 307-12
- (18) In (11) Tookyoo-e is usually pronounced with the heaviest stress.
- (19) The theme marker at the FSP level is not always equal to the subject marker at the grammatical level. Cf. Firbas, J. "On Defining the Theme in Functional Sentence Analysis" *Travaux Linguistiques de Prague* 1 Prague 1966 pp. 267-80
- (20) Cf. Saeki, T. *Gendai Nihongo-no Gojun* (The word order in present day Japanese) Tokyo 1975 p. 85 ff.
- (21) The verb could be stressed by the use of 'do.' (e.g. did fly)
- (22) This last t-element ('da' etc.) is often regarded as the concluding expression with subjective judgement. It is by no means a copula in the sense of the English 'be.'
- (23) The particle '-ga' is thought to be a rheme marker, so Jon-ga will be R in the dependent clause. Cf. Note (11). As the theme marker in this position, the particle '-no' can be used.
- (24) R-t-T (i.e. Y da, X-wa.) is possible, at least in the colloquial style, as a highly deviated (marked) structure.
- (25) Cf. Note (14)

- (26) In Japanese this form is used so widely that it gives Japanese a truly metaphoric character. (Cf. op.cit. in Note (5)) For example, the famous opening words of *The Pillow Book*, one of Japanese classics, 'Haru-wa akebono' (lit. spring-dawn.), is translated into English as 'In spring it is the dawn that is most beautiful' by I. Morris. (*The Pillow Book of Sei Shōnagon* Penguin Books 1967) But instead of 'most beautiful' we can use 'best' or 'most characteristic' etc.
- (27) His theory is called Gengo-katei Setsu (the language-process theory) by which language is defined as a system of processes. Cf. Tokieda, M. *Kokugo-gaku Genron* (The principles of Japanese linguistics) Tokyo 1941
- (28) It is translated into English as 'telescopic drawers' by a Japanese linguist. Doi, T. *The Study of Language in Japan A Historical Survey* Tokyo 1976 p. 251
- (29) To amplify CD, we use many particles such as 'ne,' something like English 'isn't it,' German 'nicht whar,' French 'n'est-ce pas,' Czech 'že' etc.
- (30) Cf. Note (5)
- (31) Yuasa, T. *La Misere de Luxe—Pari Zuisoo* (Thoughts in Paris) Tokyo 1973 p. 72
- (32) Kobayashi, Y. "Shin-no Kokusai-kooryuu-no-tame-ni" (For the true international cultural exchange) *Gakushi-kai Kaihoo* No. 731 Tokyo 1976 pp. 13-7