

# The Basic Distribution of Communicative Dynamism in Japanese<sup>①</sup>

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1. Each natural language has its own way of linear arrangement of the sentential elements, or word order, according to which the language may be classified into a certain type. The ordinary method has been based on the grammatical function of the elements, which are given respective names, such as Subject (S), Object (O), Verb (V) etc. For example, J. H. Greenberg starts from this point, classifies thirty natural languages into three basic types (I. VSO, II. SVO, III. SOV) and proposes the Basic Order Typology.<sup>②</sup> His argument is very interesting, and these word orders may be regarded as standard, but we feel they are somewhat abstractive. In real utterances, by which we should attain the end of effective communication, nonstandard word orders with permutation, deletion etc. do occur so often that there seems to be no point in making rules regarding them. They are not static but dynamic, and we can find a significant difference between the grammatical functions and communicative ones, which gives us many problems in linguistic analysis. The following discussion is an attempt to analyze some phenomena concerning word order from a communicative viewpoint.

2. To our analysis, one of the papers by F. Daneš, a member of the Prague School of Linguistics,<sup>③</sup> will be very helpful. According to him, much confusion in the discussions of syntactic problems could be avoided if we distinguished elements and rules of the following three different levels: i. e. I. level of the grammatical structure of sentence

II. level of the semantic structure of sentence

III. level of the organization of utterance

This may be attested by many linguistic facts.

In Japanese, (1) can be said to have a standard word order and the correct one at the level of the grammatical structure of sentence and is used normally in real utterances.

(1) Kare-wa omoshiroi hon-wo kaita-yo.<sup>④</sup>..... He wrote an interesting  
S O V book.

But we often use the following forms at the level of utterance and (2) can be regarded almost as normal as (1).<sup>⑤</sup> (Prosodic features are important, but for simplification they are omitted here.)

(2) Omoshiroi hon-wa kare-wo kaita-yo.  
O S V

(3) Kaita-yo kare-wa omoshiroi hon-wo.  
V S O

(4) Kare-wa kaita-yo omoshiroi hon-wo.  
S V O

(5) Omoshiroi hon-wo kaita-yo kare-wa.  
O V S

(6) Kaita-yo omoshiroi hon-wo kare-wa.  
V O S

So we can use all of the six possible kinds of word order to communicate the same meaning. They are all grammatically correct, or cannot be said incorrect, at least in colloquial Japanese. They are to be interpreted as the same at the level of the grammatical structure and at that of the semantic structure. What does this fact mean?

To answer the question, we should treat these phenomena only as the problems at the level of the organization of utterance, and we can make use of the notion and term of Communicative Dynamism (CD) introduced by J. Firbas, another member of Prague School.<sup>⑥</sup> In his opinion, CD is a property of communication, displayed in the course of the development of the information to be conveyed and consisting in advancing this development. The degree of CD carried by a linguistic element is the extent to which the element contributes to the development of the communication, to which, as it were, it pushes the communication forward. CD is to be analyzed only in a concrete situation under many complex conditions.

3. The notion of CD has been developed in the scope of the the so-called Functional Linguistics (Funkční linguistika) proposed by V. Mathesius, who published a very suggestive paper in 1939.<sup>⑦</sup> Mathesius used the terms *aktuální členění větné* and *formální členění větné*. The former is usually translated into English as Functional Sentence Perspective (FSP), which is interpretable as linear arrangement of the sentential elements including prosodic ones in real utterances. Firbas defines FSP as the distribution of various degrees of CD over the elements within a sentence, the distribution being affected by an interplay (co-operation) of the semantic and grammatical structures of the sentence under conditions created by a certain kind of contextual dependence. Each element in an utterance carries some quantity of CD, which has something to do with FSP. Generally speaking, the element carrying the minimum of CD in an utterance, or Theme Proper, is to be put in the first place, and the one carrying the maximum of CD, or Rheme Proper, in the last. Of course, there are elements called Transition between Theme and Rheme.<sup>⑧</sup> Thus, if we represent the part including Theme Proper by T, the one including Rheme Proper by R, and Transition by t, the basic distribution of CD can be shown by T-t-R, as in (7).

(7) He wrote an interesting book.  
T t R

This analysis may be true of many languages, especially of those in Europe, but we have some reasons for being doubtful about its immediate application to Japanese. We shall discuss on this point further.

4. Firbas gives the following example.<sup>⑨</sup>

(8) V pokoji seděl starý muž.  
T t R

In Japanese, the same meaning as in (8) is expressed in (9).

(9) Heya-no naka-ni roojin-ga suwa'te-ita.....lit. In the room an old man sitting was. In (9), if prosodic features are neutral or negligible, it can be said that Heya-no naka-ni is T, roojin-ga is R, and suwa'te-ita is t. Because if we continue to go on, the next utterance will almost always begin with something concerning with roojin, and so roojin has the maximum of CD in (9). Similarly, in (10), which is to be thought more normal than (9), Roojin-ga is supposed to be T, heya-no naka-ni is R, and suwa'te-ita is t.

(10) Roojin-ga heya-no naka-ni suwa'te-ita....lit. An old man in the room sitting was. If our analysis is correct, the normal distribution of CD in (9) and (10) is not T-t-R, but T-R-t. The same will be seen in (11) and (12), too.

(11) Anata-wa dare desu-ka?..... lit. You who are?

(12) Sore-wa doko desu-ka?..... lit. It where is?

Evidently, in (11) and (12), the interrogatives are R's, and the possible answers to them are :

(13) Watashi-wa Taroo desu..... lit. I Taroo am.

(14) Sore-wa tsukue-no-ue desu..... lit. It on the desk is.

So we have good reasons to think that the distribution of CD in (11), (12), (13), and (14) is normally T-R-t. This will be also true of (1)~(6) in 2.

Of course, this is merely normal, or basic, and word order is only one of the means to the distribution of CD. We should take account of prosodic features. It is safe to say that there is a correspondence between the gamut of CD and that of prosodic weight. Generally, the heaviest prosodic weight ( $\swarrow$ ) falls on R, the second ( $\wedge$ ) on T, and t has relatively weak prosodic features ( $\searrow$ ). Therefore in Japanese, the prosodically basic distribution in an utterance consists of  $\wedge \swarrow \searrow$ . Thus, if in (9) the heaviest falls on Heya-no naka-ni, the distribution of CD will be not T-R-t, but R-T-t ( $\swarrow \wedge \searrow$ ), one of the marked structures in Japanese. This fact will support our view.

Here we can get a hypothesis that the basic distribution of CD in Japanese is T-R-t, contrasted with that of many other languages.

5. This distribution of CD can possibly have an influence upon the communicative development, which can be shown by some linear form. The analysis of the following passages<sup>10</sup> will give an explanation of it. Though (15) in Czech and (16) is in Japanese, we can suppose they have the same meaning.

(15) *Babička měla syna a dvě dcery. Nejstarší žila mnoho let ve Vídni u přátel,*  
 $T_1 \quad t_1 \quad R_1 \quad T_2 \quad t_2 \quad R_2$   
*od nichž se vdala.* (B. Němcová *Babička*)  
 $T_3 \quad R_3$

(16) *O-baa-chan-niwa musuko-ga hitori to musume-ga hutari a'ta. Ichiban-toshi-ue-no*  
 $T_1 \quad R_1 \quad t_1 \quad T_2$   
*musume-wa uiin-no shinrui-no uchi-de naganen kurashite ita-ga, soko-kara o-yome-ni i'ta.*  
 $R_2 \quad t_2 \quad T_3 \quad R_3$

..... lit. To Granny a son and two daughters were. The eldest daughter with relatives in Vienna for many years lived, and from there as a bride went.

Both (15) and (16) have the typical distribution of CD, which can be schematized as in

(17) and (18), respectively.


(17)  $T_1 - t_1 - R_1 \cdots T_2 - t_2 - R_2 \cdots T_3 - (t_3) - R_3 \cdots \rightarrow$

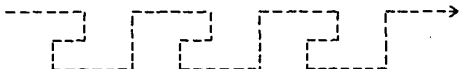
(18)  $T_1 - R_1 - t_1 \cdots T_2 - R_2 - t_2 \cdots T_3 - R_3 - (t_3) \cdots \rightarrow$

(17) and (18) do look similar, but from the communicative point of view, there is a great difference between them. In (17),  $R_1$  is immediately connected with  $T_2$ ,  $R_2$  with  $T_3$ , and so on. But in (18), there is  $t_1$  between  $R_1$  and  $T_2$ ,  $t_2$  between  $R_2$  and  $T_3$ , and so on. Thus (18) will have to be rewritten into something like (19).

(19)  $T_1 - R_1 - t_1 \quad T_2 - R_2 - t_2 \quad T_3 - R_3 - (t_3) \quad \cdots \rightarrow$

If extremely simplified, the lines of (17) and (19) will become as (20) and (21), respectively.

(20) 

(21) 

By (20) and (21) we can see the communicative line in Czech (and perhaps in many European languages) is straight, but that in Japanese the line is rather snaky<sup>Ⓢ</sup>. And it will explain some of the characteristics of communication in Japanese.

6. In Japanese, to locate R is sometimes much more difficult than in other languages, as shown below.

(22) Chodil vždy *s kloboukem v ruce*. At' byl sebevětší úpal mrazový nebo sluneční, nanejvýš že držel svůj, nízký ale baňatý cylindr se širokou střešou *nad hlavou jako parasol*. (J. Neruda "Hastrman" *Povídky malostranské*)

(23) He always walked *with hat in hand*, let the season threaten frost-stroke or heat-stroke; the greatest concession he ever made was to hold his low-crowned, rounded hat with the wide brim *over his head like a parasol*. (Translated by E. Pargeter)

(24) Kare-wa itsumo *booshi-wo te-ni mo'te* aruite-ita. Donnani ite-tsuite-mo *teri-tsukete-mo*, seizei, asai o-kama-gata-no, tsuba-no hiroi jibun-no booshi-wo, *parasoru-no-yoo-ni atama-no-ue-ni* kazasu dake da'ta.

The italicized parts should be R's. In (22) and (23) the positions of R's are more definite, and R's are more easily identified than in (24). As mentioned in 2., Japanese has relatively free word order, and, without clear prosodic features, we should often be led to misunderstanding.

Adding to the above fact, the positions of R and t in Japanese tend to decrease total quantity of CD of an utterance, and the contact in the channel of communication is made weaker. Thus, to strengthen the contact, t, being prosodically weak, is often cut off. For, with the preceding R, t is felt superfluous or unnecessary. As a result, the utterance type like (25) appears.

(25) Kare-wa Tookyoo.....lit. He Tokyo.

If the context or situation were not given, (25) might mean that he is in Tokyo, or that he is from Tokyo, or that he likes Tokyo, or anything possible including him and Tokyo.

In other words, (25) is a quite ambiguous sentence. But if (25) is complemented and fully expressed as (26), this ambiguity will disappear.

(26) Kare-wa Tookyoo-ni i-masu, etc.……lit. He in Tokyo is, etc.

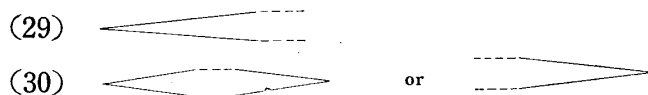
So we can say (25) consists of only T and R with omission of t, or rather with commission of the choice of t for the hearer. This will give some validity to our hypothesis mentioned in 4. And many speakers of other languages may be surprised at the fact that the utterance like (25) usually gives no difficulty to native speakers of Japanese. Indeed, this utterance type is used everywhere, and seems to be a favourite of the Japanese people, who are fond of the so-called “implicit understanding”.<sup>②</sup>

If an utterance in Japanese has a full form, and the distribution of CD is the T-R-t type, the utterance can be said to have the element with less CD at its end, or it is closed to the right, i. e. in the direction that communication should proceed. This will be contrasted with Czech and many other languages. (27) and (28) will confirm this point.

(27) Napsal zajímavou knihu (,která……). ……He wrote an interesting book (,which ……).

(28) Kare-wa (……no yoo-na) omoshiroi hon-wo kaita. or (……no yoo-na) omoshiroi hon-wo kare-wa kaita.

With the use of a relative pronoun etc., (27) can have an open end, but (28) has a closed end, as shown in (29) and (30).



(29) tells the possibility of additional information, but (30) can not. This means that Japanese has less efficiency in communication than Czech and many other languages. In fact, many Japanese are not so communicative, perhaps because of the nature and the type of their language. At least, seemingly, most Japanese prefer self-contained expressions in communication, which may reduce the total amount of CD. And to increase CD, many particles such as -da, -yo, -ne, -wa, -da-yo, -da-wa-yo, -da-wa-yo-ne etc.<sup>③</sup> are used at the end of utterances. In general, these particles have not any definite meaning, and may be called intensifiers. This also seems to be one of the characteristics of the language.

7. Thus we can analyze some of the characteristics of the communication in Japanese on the hypothesis that basic distribution of CD in a Japanese sentence belongs to the T-R-t type. This hypothesis is, of course, only tentative and we have much yet to discuss. But the CD theory introduced by the Prague School seems to have a great future and we hope it to be more successful.

## Notes

① This is based on one of my papers, 'Bun-yooso-no hairetsu-ni kansuru ichi koosatsu' (On the Arrangement of Sentential Elements) *Atomi-Gakuen Joshi-Daigaku Kiyoo* No.7 published on March 15, 1974.

② J. H. Greenberg ed. *Universals of Language* Cambridge, Mass. 1963 p. 76 ff.

③ F. Daneš 'A Three-Level Approach to Syntax' *Travaux Linguistiques de Prague (TLP)* 1 Prague 1966 pp. 225-240

④ -yo is one of the particles which are usually put at the end of an utterance. cf. ⑬

⑤ Greenberg points out that Japanese, like Turkish, Hindi, Burmese etc., belongs to the languages in which the Verb is always at the end. Greenberg, op. cit. p. 79

⑥ cf. J. Firbas a. 'On Defining the Theme in Functional Sentence Analysis' *TLP* 1

b. 'Non-Thematic Subjects in Contemporary English' *TLP* 2 Prague 1966

c. 'On the Interplay of Prosodic and Non-Prosodic Means of Functional Sentence Perspective' V. Fried ed. *The Prague School of Linguistics and Language Teaching* London 1972 pp. 77-94

⑦ V. Mathesius 'O tak zvaném aktuálním členění větěném' *Slovo a slovesnost* 5 Prague 1939 pp. 171-174

⑧ It must be noted that Theme and Rheme are not Topic and Comment. Topic-Comment analysis argued by some linguists is rather static and seems solely based on word order.

⑨ Firbas, op. cit a. p. 274

⑩ cf. F. Daneš 'One Instance of Prague School Methodology: Functional Analysis of Utterance and Text' P. L. Garvin ed. *Method and Theory in Linguistics* The Hague 1970 pp. 132-146

⑪ The word 'snaky' may imply something indirect, but here it is not used in a pejorative sense.

⑫ This fondness will sometimes give them difficulties in an international situation.

⑬ For example, Kare-wa Tookyoo-da,.....Tookyoo-yo,.....Tookyoo-dayo,.....Tookyoo-da-wa-yo-ne etc. Here the polite (and honorific) forms in Japanese show complexity. According to the occasion and the person, the simple '.....da' form may be changed into '.....desu,' '.....de-ari-masu,' '.....de gozai-masu,' '.....de-ira'shai-masu,' '.....de-arase-rare-masu' etc.