Existence and Possession in Japanese

Ruijia Zhang
North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China.


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Corresponding author: Ruijia Zhang, North China Electric Power University, Beijing, China.

Abstract
The existential and possessive sentences in Japanese are analyzed under the concept-construction interface. It consists of three parts. The first part discusses the conceptual meaning of the concept of existence and the concept of possession. The second part discusses the constructional meaning of the basic construction used to express the concept of existence and possession in Japanese. The third part analyzes the interaction between the conceptual meaning and the constructional meaning in Japanese iru possessive sentence on the concept-construction interface. The main conclusion is that the concept of possession is a kind of non-processual relation, in which the possessee must be virtual. The concept of existence is a process of temporality, in which the existing entity can be either virtual or actual. In Japanese, the sentence pattern with inconsistent conceptual meaning and constructional meaning is iru possessive sentence, whose conceptual meaning is possession and constructional meaning is existence. However, in the process of fusion, the possessor and the possessee in Japanese iru possessive sentence get similar prominence.

Keywords
Existence, possession, Japanese sentence, cognitive grammar

1. Existence and Possession at the Conceptual Level

In *Investigations in Cognitive Grammar*, Langacker devoted a separate chapter to detail the meaning of possession and existence and the relationship between them. In this paper, the concepts of existence and possession and the description of the relationship between them are basically based on the ideas in this book, but some adjustments and supplements are made to the conceptual interface proposed in this paper.

1.1 The conceptual meaning of possession

Early researchers had a general understanding of the concept of possession. They believed that possession meant that there was some relationship between the possessor and the possessee (Bendix, 1966). In fact, the semantic features of conceptualization go far beyond that. In *Langacker 2009*, the concept of possession was analyzed in two levels in detail. The following is a brief introduction of this analysis.

In terms of schematic semantics, Langacker believes that the reference point ability can be used to describe the conceptual features. In the figure below, the conceptualizer regards an entity as a reference point and then evokes a set of associated entities, one of which is the target. In this relation, the order of mental attention movement is fixed, that is, the conceptualizer C→ the possessor R→ the possessee T. This feature, that is, the asymmetric and irreversible feature between the possessor and the possessee, is inherent in the possessive relation.

Next comes the semantic characteristics at the prototype level. There are three conceptual prototypes: ownership, kinship and whole-part relationship. Different from the schema semantics of possession, the possessor (R) actively controls the possessee (T) in some way. Such control may in some cases be manifested as the exclusive privilege of the possessor to access T.
The above is the semantic description of possession concept in Langacker (2009). This description is actually the semantic content after adding the subjectively construed parts. On the basis of the above semantic features, removing the subjectively construed parts is the conceptual meaning of the concept of possession in this paper. In this way, the conceptual meaning at the conceptual prototype level and the schematic level can be described as follows:

In addition, this paper proposes another semantic feature of the concept of possession: the target must be virtual. This feature refers to the fact that the possessee in the possessive relation does not presuppose existence, that is, the possessee is brought to the listener's mental world through the possessive relation for the first time. In the possessive relation, the possessee is dependent on the possessor and described as the property of the possessor, which is often embodied as an indefinite noun in form, such as Taro has a car, while the possessee a car is used to indicate the property of Taro, that is, Taro is a person with a car. We cannot say that Taro has the car without any context, which is unnatural, because the car refers to a separate entity, presupposes the existence of the entity. This kind of definite Noun is not suitable for describing attributes. This feature can be represented as follows:
1.2 The conceptual meaning of existence

In previous studies, the analysis of the characteristics of the meaning of existence can be generally summarized as *the physical spatial relationship between X and Y* or *X is in the position of Y* (Kageyama, 2011; Kishimoto, 2005; Jackendoff, 1983). Langer (2009) describes the semantic features of two types of existence: location and existence. Location can also be described by the reference point ability, which can be represented as follows:

![Fig. 5. The Schema of the Conceptual Meaning of Existence.](image)

This paper holds that there is also a problem of actuality in existence relation. The entity in the existence relation can be either actual or virtual. While describing the location of a virtual entity, the existence of the entity is also confirmed.

In the aspect of prototype semantics, this paper points out that a significant semantic feature is processual. The position of the entity in an existence relation is not fixed, but temporary. This is different from the possessive relationship, in which there is a stable and long-term relationship between the possessor and the possessee, which belongs to a non-processual relationship. We can represent locative process as follows:

![Fig. 6. The Schema of the Conceptual Meaning of Locative.](image)

2. Japanese Existential and Possessive Sentences at the Constructional Level

Among the studies on the types of Japanese existential sentences, representative literatures include Kinsui (2006), Nishiyama (2003), etc. In these studies, sentences are classified as the subcategory of existential sentences. This paper adopts the standard of classification in Kinsui (2006), whether there is agreement between the verb and the *ga* case noun, existential and possessive sentences of Japanese can be divided into two categories, namely *aru/iru* construction with agreement and *aru/iru* construction without agreement. Among them, the basic semantic of *aru/iru* construction with agreement is existence. This construction can be divided into two subconstructions: *niga* construction and *gani* construction. *niga* construction indicates an existence relationship, *gani* construction indicates a locative process. *aru/iru* construction without agreement can be also divided into two subconstructions: *niga* construction and *gani* construction. The former indicates possession, while the latter indicates existence.

3. Japanese Existential and Possessive Sentences under the Concept-construction Interface

In this paper, the constructions whose basic meaning is possession are called the possessive constructions, and the constructions whose basic meaning is existence are called the existential constructions. The above
The aru/iru construction without agreement is a possessive construction, and the aru/iru construction with agreement is an existential construction. Many languages have the phenomenon of using the same construction to express two concepts, such as Japanese aru/iru construction with agreement, which can represent either the notion of existence, or the notion of possession.

3.1 The relationship between existential construction and possessive construction

According to Langacker, possession and existence share an abstract conceptual feature based on the ability of reference points. This abstract commonality enables the existence construction to be used for the representation of the concept of possession, and the possessive construction to be used for the representation of the concept of existence.

3.2 The interaction between conceptual meaning and constructional meaning

When there are differences in semantic features between conceptual meaning and constructional meaning, they will interact and influence each other when they are fused to form a new sentence, resulting in unique sentence meaning. Japanese iru possessive sentences use existential construction to express the concept of possession, such as: Taro ni mago ga iru. The conceptual meaning of this sentence is possession, and the constructional meaning is existence. The process of the fusion of the two to form a iru possessive sentence can be expressed as follows:

![Fig. 7. Japanese iru possessive sentence.](image)

The lower left concept means possession. There is a landmark in the domain identified by the trajector, and the trajector controls the landmark. The landmark is a virtual entity. The lower right is the constructional meaning, which is existence, also described in terms of reference point ability. The conceptualizer C identifies a search domain by reference points, and the target T is located in this search domain. In the process of fusion of conceptual meaning and constructional meaning, due to the opposite identity of trajector or landmark organization, the interaction between conceptual meaning and constructional meaning is generated, that is, the fusion of the identity of trajector or landmark, resulting in the same degree of prominence of the reference point and the target in the Japanese iru possessive sentence formed by the fusion. This phenomenon is manifested in the meaning of the sentence, that is, the possessee assumes the function of part of the subject. Therefore, the meaning of the Japanese iru possessive sentence is no longer possession, but the possessee exists in the domain of the possessor.

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