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〈原著論文〉

Word Order and Thematic Structure in Language Change

A Preliminary Survey

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言語変化における語順と主題構造—予備的考察

小林茂之

現在知られている言語の大部分は、SVO 語順か SOV 語順である。Newmeyer (2000) は、原言語の語順は SOV であると論じている。この仮説において興味深い点は、SOV 言語において名詞句のもつ動作主、対象などの主題役割が主語や目的語などの文法関係よりも重要な役割を果たしているという議論である。

本稿は、Newmeyer の仮説がミニマリスト理論における“Merge”の SOV 言語への適用やミニマリスト理論が適用されてきた古英語の語順に関する統語的研究にどのように影響するのかについての予備的考察である。統語論において主題構造に大きな役割をもたせるという立場では、文の基底構造の語順に関する従来の研究とは異なる分析が可能である。

Key words; word order, thematic roles, grammatical relations, scrambling, syntactic change

0 Introduction

Newmeyer (2000) has argued for the prototype of word order of human languages. He proposed the following:

- (1) The earliest human language had rigid SOV (i.e. subject-object-verb) word order.
(Newmeyer (1))

In addition to the above proposition, he has also proposed the following change in word order as follows:

- (2) The historical change $OV > VO$ is both more common than the change $VO > OV$ and more 'natural'. (Newmeyer (3))

He has also referred to many previous language typological studies on word order. He has reviewed the tendency for SOV order to be predominant both historically and typologically. He concluded as follows:

- (3) SOV order was once much more typologically predominant than it is now. (Newmeyer (4))

He has pointed out the relevant cognitive basis for SOV order as follows:

- (4) Protolanguages had thematic structure. (Newmeyer (5))

If propositions are expressed in sentences, they should have a thematic structure consisting of a predicate and its arguments.

He has argued that the morphological system which some SVO languages lack should be required, as follows:

- (5) If arguments precede their heads, as they do in SOV languages, extra cues are useful to identify their status. This can be accomplished by keeping them contiguous to the head ... and/or by endowing them with case marking that uniquely their thematic role or helps to narrow down the possibilities.

Kiparsky (1997) argued for a morphological case marking system including inflectional morphology or positioning of arguments.

Newmeyer also concluded that SVO order cannot be a proto-order of languages, as follows:

- (6) There are obvious functional reasons, ... why SVO is a better order than SOV when thematic roles are not overtly marked. Hence I see no creole-based arguments for early human language having a basic order of SVO.

According to Newmeyer, a proto-order of languages should not have a SVO pattern. We

should adopt the SOV pattern hypothesis, and pursue thematic structure as the basis on which such a hypothesis relies.

1 Thematic Structure and Grammatical Relations

Natural Languages have two ways of representation for relations between predicates and their arguments. One of them is through thematic structure and the other is through grammatical relations.

Newmeyer observed that “in English, a typical SVO language ... , the verb *find* ... can take an agent, a theme or a locative as a subject”:

- (7) a . Mary found what she was looking for.
 b . My old sofa found a home in the departmental lounge.
 c . Noon found Bill eating lunch in the Student Union.

(Newmeyer (8))

Concerning the above observation, he pointed out that “Such a one-many mapping between grammatical and thematic roles is much rarer in SOV languages.” The relation between grammatical relations and thematic roles seems obscure, and the former seems predominant to the latter.

Newmeyer attributes the reason as to why SVO languages have a rigid relation between grammatical relations and thematic roles to the case marking system, as follows:

- (8) Another illustration of the fact that SOV languages reveal the thematic role of syntactic positions more directly than do SVO languages comes from the fact that the former are much more likely to have rich case marking than the latter.

Newmeyer explains the function of case marking in SOV languages as follows:

- (9) If arguments precede their heads, as they do in SOV languages, extra cues are useful to identify thematic status. This can be accomplished ... by endowing them with case marking that uniquely identifies their thematic role or helps to narrow down the possibilities.

Thus, Newmeyer assumes that SOV languages make use of case marking in identifying thematic roles.

2 The Case Marking System and Thematic Roles in Modern Japanese

All DPs or nominal expressions in Modern Japanese should be assigned case markers as a matter of course. Subject DPs are usually assigned the nominative particle *ga*, with some exceptions. Object DPs are usually assigned the accusative particle *o*. Indirect Object DPs are assigned the dative particle *ni*. Grammatical relations correspond to the case markers, with some exceptions.

Case marking particles mostly correspond to thematic roles, as Newmeyer argues:

- (10) Nominative *ga*: Agent
 Accusative *o*: Theme
 Dative *ni*: Recipient

For example, *ataeru*, “give”, allocates *ga*, *o*, and *ni* to DPs, according to their thematic roles, as follows:

- (11) Taro-*ga* Hanako-*ni* Hon-*o* atae-*ta*.
 Taro-Nom Hanako-Dat book-Acc give-Past
 “Taro gave Hanako a book.”

Ataeru, “give”, has a thematic structures as follows:

- (12) *Ataeru*: [Agent, Recipient, Theme]
 | | |
ga *ni* *o*

The case marking particles represent the grammatical relations which DPs adjacent to the particles carry. The linking rules which relate thematic roles to grammatical relations represented by case markers are relatively rigid, as Newmeyer argues.

The Uniformity Theta Assignment Hypothesis (Baker 1988) is well-known as the projection rule that was proposed for relating thematic roles of arguments to grammatical relations to the predicates.

The projection rule works well with SVO languages in which the cases which are assigned DPs are represented by the syntactic positions. However, we need to assume scrambling for languages like Modern Japanese because the word order can be optionally changed. For example, (11) has the following word order variations:

- (13) a. Taro-ga hon-o Hanako-ni atae-ta.
 b. Hanako-ni Taro-ga Hon-o atae-ta.
 c. Hanako-ni Hon-o Taro-ga atae-ta.
 d. Hon-o Taro-ga Hanako-ni atae-ta.
 e. Hon-o Hanako-ni Taro-ga atae-ta.

We need to assume, as Kuroda (1978) did, that Modern Japanese has a basic word order, if we retain the UTAH or other linking rules, and relate thematic roles to case marking particles through grammatical relations.

3 Merge and Scrambling

Many syntactic approaches to the Minimalist Program (Chomsky 1995) take for granted that a predicate is unified with its theme argument by “Merge, and forms a V.” That nothing intervenes between a predicate and its theme argument can be automatically explained by the above-mentioned operation. Thus adverbs cannot be placed between predicates and their theme arguments, as follows:

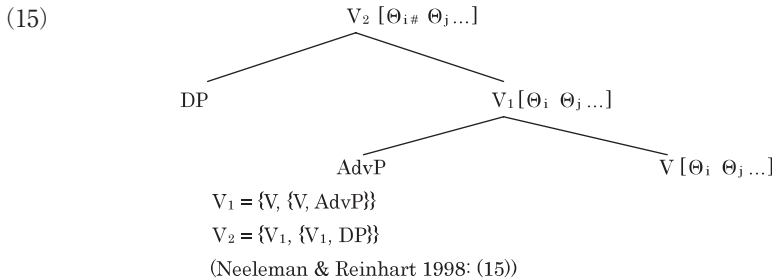
- (14) a. Ken often reads books.
 b. *Ken reads often books.

This constraint has been posited since Stowell (1981). Though some languages, like French, are observed to violate this constraint, verbs are thought to experience “movement” after “Merge for such cases to be preposed before adverbs.”

If we universally posit this constraint for human languages, we need to posit “scrambling” for

word order in Japanese as in (13), because the theme arguments are not adjacent to the verb in the sentences.

However, Neeleman and Reinhart (1998) proposed “Merge” as an operation at the PF interface level after a computational system involving syntax. They argue that “DP can be used to satisfy one of V_1 's internal Θ -roles”. We cite their configuration below.



In the above configuration, DP can be merged with the verb after the adverbial is merged with the verb. Thus we need not immediately merge the verb with its theme argument if we adopt their hypothesis. In addition, we can abandon such linking rules as the UTAH. Instead, we postulate thematic structures to guarantee the relation between arguments and head verbs.

Neeleman and Reinhart explained that adverbials cannot intervene between theme arguments and verbs.

- (16) John [_{VP} v-read [_{VP} slowly [_V t_v to his children]]]
 (Neeleman & Reinhart (21))

- (17) *John [_{VP} v-read [_{VP} slowly [_V t_v the letter]]]
 (Neeleman & Reinhart (22))

They argue that “the movement of the object would be ruled out on a par with superraising. This implies that the adverbial occupies an A-position. Hence, a movement of the object that crosses the adverbial would violate relativized minimality.” Thus they attribute the ill-formedness of (17) to the Relativized Minimality Condition (Rizzi 1990).

They also argue that “In OV languages, for instance, both [double objects] are moved to a preverbal position, presumably to facilitate feature-checking.” If this is so, the accusative case can be checked even though the goal intervenes between the theme’s checking position and the Θ -position.

In sum, we don't need a rigid word order for SOV languages because thematic structure functions in order to license DPs as arguments of verbs as long as DPs precede verbs.

4 Word Order Change in English History

It is well-known that Old English has SOV word order which, contrary to Modern English, appears quite frequently. English changed from an OV language into a VO language in the formation of Middle English. Fischer *et al.* (2000) takes the position that VO order should be base-generated in Old English syntax, though some previous studies take the opposite position, i.e., that OV order should be base-generated.

If we assume that Middle English developed straightforwardly from Old English, this word order change in English can be directly analyzed from the point of view of the P & P Theory. However, Roberts (2007) argues for this change as follows:

- (18) OV order and its implicational correlate V Aux appear to have been incrementally lost in English, beginning probably in late OE, with the final disappearance of OV only taking place at the end of the fifteenth century. If language change is driven by language acquisition, this cannot be a single parameter change; instead we must view OV order as arising from the interaction of several parameters, which tend to act harmonically.
(Roberts 2007: 197)

If we take into consideration the effects from dialect variations at the period when language change occurred, we must examine the competition model by Pintzuk (2002) and Kroch and Taylor (1997). According to their analyses, VO order was triggered by the influence of the northern dialects. In other words, we need not to take the position that Old and Middle English had consistent underlying word order as in Fisher *et al.*

Van Kemenade (1987) was a pioneered work of Old English OV order on the generative grammar framework. We cite the SOV examples from it below.

(19) a. þæ ic þas boc of Ledenum gereorde to Engliscra spræce
that I this book from Latin Language to English tongue
awende (AHTh, I, pref, 6)

translate

'that I translate this book from the Latin language to the
English tongue'

b. þeh þe he hie mid micle forlore þas folces beggate (Oros, 72, 11)
though that he them with great loss of people achieved
'though he achieved them with great loss of people'

c. ... gif hie him aþs rices upon (Parker 755)
if they him the kingdom granted
'if they would grant him the kingdom'

(qtd. in van Kemenade 1987: 16)

Since the sentences in example (19) are subordinate clauses, the basic word order in OE is thought to be SOV as long as the verb second effect, which is observed in main clauses, is irrelevant.⁽¹⁾

Moreover, the crucial point is that "The basic position for the verb is VP-final," because thematic roles are thought to be more efficient in SOV languages than SVO ones, as Newmeyer argues.

Newmeyer (2000) concludes as follows:

(20) The earliest human language had rigid SOV order.
(Newmeyer (15) = (1))

This hypothesis seems to be applicable to OE. In van Kemenade (1987), subject DPs usually precede object DPs.

5 Conclusion

In the history of the English language, SOV word order changed to SVO word order. It can be

assumed that this change occurred not only in relation to word order, but also to case systems, as licensing DPs can be accomplished both through grammatical relations and through thematic roles. This may mean that English changed to the use of grammatical relations, rather than thematic roles during the change from OE to ME. This study is a mere sketch written in order to describe the process of this language change.

Remarks

- (1) Objects pronouns are observed to precede subject DPs; however, such object pronouns are thought to be clitics (van Kemenade 1987: 60).

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