

Verbal Prefix Selection in Old Japanese: A Corpus-Based Study

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Abstract : There are a number of verbal prefixes in Old Japanese. However, the selection or the compatibility of verbs and verbal prefixes is among the least investigated topics on Old Japanese language. Unlike other types of prefixes, verbal prefixes in dictionaries are more often than not listed with very brief information such as 'unknown meaning' or 'rhythmic function only'. To fill in a part of this knowledge gap, this paper presents an exhaustive investigation based on the newly developed 'Oxford Corpus of Old Japanese' (OCOJ), which included nearly all existing resource of Old Japanese language, with detailed linguistics information in TEI-XML tags. In this paper, we propose the possibility that the following three prefixes, i-, sa-, ta- (with ta- being considered as a variation of sa-), are relevant to split intransitivity in Old Japanese, with evidence that unergative verbs favor i- and that unergative verbs favor sa-(ta-). This might be undermined by the fact that transitives are also found to follow i-. However, with several manifestations of split intransitivity in Old Japanese discussed, the behavior of transitives in verbal prefix selection is no longer as surprising as it may seem to be when one look at the selection of verbal prefix in isolation. It is possible that there are one or more features that played essential roles in determining the selection of i-, and the attested transitive verbs happen to have these features. The data suggest that this feature is a sense of 'change' of location or state involved in the event donated by the verb, which is a feature of typical unaccusatives. This is further discussed in the 'affectedness' hierarchy. The presentation of this paper, which includes a brief demonstration of the OCOJ, is expected to be of the interest of both specialists and general audiences.

Keywords : old Japanese, split intransitivity, unaccusatives, unergatives, verbal prefix selection

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