

Referential Expressions and Syntax-Semantics(-Pragmatics) Interface

The exact nature of referential possibilities of the so-called reflexive *jibun* (or *zibun*) has been a contentious issue throughout the history of Japanese linguistics. This is mainly because this expression has a wider referential than other languages such as English. The dialectal and idiolectal variation also accounts for the controversy.

There have been many attempts to capture the behaviour of *jibun* by syntactic constraints. One such example, which is relatively comprehensive, is proposed by Kameyama (1984: 228). She proposed that the antecedent for *jibun* (a) must be the subject of the sentence; (b) need not be in the same clause as *jibun*; (c) must 'command' *jibun*; and (d) must be animate. Such conditions alone cannot explain the following examples:

- (1) Taroo-ga Jiroo-ni jibun-no-koto-wo hanas-ase-ta.
Taroo-NOM Jiroo-DAT jibun-GEN-COMP-ACC tell-PASS-PAST
"Taroo_i had Jiroo_j talk about self_{i/j}"
- (2) Taroo-ga Jiroo-ni jibun-no-koto-wo hanasite-morat-ta.
Taroo-NOM Jiroo-DAT jibun-GEN-COMP-ACC tell-BENE-PAST
"Taroo_i benefited from Jiroo_j talking about self_{i/j}"
- (3) Taroo-ga Jiroo-ni jibun-to-sokkurina-otoko-ga-iru-koto-wo
Taroo-NOM Jiroo-DAT jibun-COMP-resemble-man-NOM-exist-COMP-ACC
shiras-are-ta.
inform-PASS-PAST
"Taroo_i was informed by Jiroo_j of the fact that there is a man resembling self_{i/j}"
- (4) Taroo-wa Jiroo-kara Saburoo-ga jibun-wo bengosuru-koto-wo
Taroo-NOM Jiroo-from Saburoo-NOM jibun-ACC defend-NOM-ACC
kiita.
heard
"Taroo_i heard from Jiroo_j that Saburoo_k would defend self_{i/j/k}"
- (5) Taroo-wa Jiroo-ni Saburoo-ga jibun-wo nikundeiru-koto-wo
Taroo-NOM Jiroo-DAT Saburoo-NOM jibun-ACC hate-NOM-ACC
kiita.
heard
"Taroo_i heard from Jiroo_j that Saburoo_k hated self_{i/j/k}"
- (6) Taroo-wa Jiroo-ni Saburoo-ga jibun-wo nikundeiru-koto-wo
Taroo-NOM Jiroo-DAT Saburoo-NOM jibun-ACC hate-NOM-ACC
hanashita.
told
"Taroo_i told Jiroo_j that Saburoo_k hated self_{i/*j/k}"

- (7) Jibun-ga gandearu-toiu-shindan-ga Taroo-wo
 jibun-NOM has cancer-COMP-diagnosis-NOM Taroo-ACC

zetsuboo-ni-oiyatta.
 despair-DAT-sent

“The diagnosis that self_i has cancer despaired Taroo_i.”

(1)-(3) may be explained by extending the condition (a): ‘the sentence’ can cover an embedded one as in the case of (1) and (2) or ‘the subject’ could be changed to ‘the agent’ as in (3). Others, however, do not seem to be accounted for by such modification. For instance, *Jiroo* in (4) and (5) is neither the subject nor the agent in any conceivable sense. In (6), on the other hand, the seemingly same *Jiroo* cannot act as the antecedent. Finally, in (7), there is no real antecedent, for *jibun* appears in the sentence-initial position.

To account for these examples, Kameyama (1984: 230-1) revises her conditions, employing the following features:

- [+/- sb] whether or not the antecedent must be a grammatical subject
- [+/- ncl] whether or not the antecedent must be in the same clause nucleus as the anaphor
- [+/- log] whether or not the anaphor must lie in an indirect discourse structure with respect to the antecedent that designates the “logophoric” subject

Logophoric pronouns, as originally proposed by Hagege (1974), are those pronouns which refer to the author of a discourse or someone whose thoughts are reported. Clements (1975: 141) slightly extends this, stating that the antecedent of the logophoric pronoun must be “the individual (other than the speaker) whose speech, thoughts, feelings, or general state of consciousness are reported”.

Following Clements, Kameyama’s main proposal is that *jibun* has the disjunctive feature [+sb/+log]. In the version of Lexical Functional Grammar in which Kameyama’s account is given, the deep-structure subjects of transformational grammar correspond to XCOMP SUBJ, i.e. the subject of an open complement, which has the feature [+sb]. This means that noun phrases in the problematic examples will have the following features:

- (4) Taroo [+sb]; Jiroo [+log]; Saburoo [+sb]
- (5) Taroo [+sb]; Jiroo [+log]; Saburoo [+sb, +log]
- (6) Taroo [+sb]; Jiroo OBJ2; Saburoo [+sb, +log]
- (7) Taroo [+log]

The proposed feature can thus explain the fact that *Jiroo* cannot be the antecedent of *jibun* in (6). It should be noted here that by adding the feature [+ log], Kameyama’s account no longer remains purely syntactic.

So far so good. There are, however, examples that suggest it is not sufficient.

- (8) Hanako-wa Masako-ni jibun-ga kimeta-jikan-ni
 Hanako-TOP Masako-DAT jibun-NOM decided-time-at

kuukoo-ni mukaenikite-morat-ta.
 airport-to come and meet-BENE-PAST

“Hanako_i benefited from Masako_j’s coming to meet her at the time self_{i/?j} had decided.”

- (9) Hanako-wa Masako-ni jibun-no-ie-de gochisoo-wo
Hanako-TOP Masako-DAT jibun-GEN-house-LOC feast-ACC

youishite-morat-ta.
prepare-BENE-PAST

“Hanako_i benefited from Masako_j’s preparing a feast at self_{i/j}’s house.”

- (10) Hanako-wa Masako-ni jibun-no-munenouchi-wo
Hanako-TOP Masako-DAT jibun-GEN-feelings-ACC

kiite-morat-ta.
listen-BENE-PAST

“Hanako_i benefited from Masako_j’s listening to how self_{i/*j} felt.”

- (11) Hanako-wa Masako-ni jibun-no-ie-ni
Hanako-TOP Masako-DAT jibun-GEN-house-to

kaette-morat-ta.
go back-BENE-PAST

“Hanako_i benefited from Masako_j’s going back to self_{i/?j}’s house.”

Kuno (1978; cf. Kuno and Kaburaki 1977) employs the notion of empathy in order to account for the referential behaviour of *jibun*. Under his framework, the examples (8)-(11) are speaker-oriented, i.e. the sententially-denoted event is reported from the viewpoint of the subject, *Hanako*. This is because all these sentences contain *morau* (literally “receive”), one of the numerous verbs of giving and receiving in Japanese, which functions like an auxiliary and implies that the referent of the subject benefited from the reported event. This works for (8) and (10) where there appears to be a strong preference for *jibun* to refer back to *Hanako*. However, *jibun* can either be *Hanako* or *Masako* in (9), and even worse, it would under normal circumstances refer to *Masako* in (11). Kameyama’s account, equipped with logophoricity, cannot explain these examples, either, as it would have to assign the feature [+sb] to *Hanako* in all examples. Moreover, as all of the examples report *Hanako*’s perspective, it would have to assign the feature [+log] or something similar as well. It should follow that *Hanako* would have to be the antecedent of *jibun* in (8)-(11), a counter-intuitive conclusion.

The problem arises because the referent of *jibun* needs to take into account contextual plausibility, on top of its preference for the referent of the subject expression and the logophoric entity. That is, the main reason why *jibun* should refer to *Hanako* in (8) and (10) is because that interpretation is contextually plausible. It is more convenient for *Hanako* if she can decide the time *Masako* comes to pick her up in (8), and *Hanako* can feel better by having had *Masako* listening to her feeling. (Also, it would be rather strange for *Hanako* to tell *Masako* how *Masako* feels.) Similarly, *Masako* can be *jibun*’s strongly-preferred antecedent in (11) is because of contextual plausibility: *kaeru* “go back” is agent-oriented and it would be natural to assume *Masako* went back to her own house. And *jibun* in (9) can refer to either because *Hanako* could be a beneficiary wherever cooking is done.

For the benefit of non-native speakers of Japanese, it should perhaps be pointed out at this point that *jibun* can in some cases refer to the speaker (or the author) of the entire sentence: here it applies to the case of (8) (and possibly also to (9)). This may be accounted for if the notion of logophoricity is somehow extended but it is difficult to conceive how; and it still remains essential to explicate contextual plausibility, for *jibun* does not always refer to the speaker/author.

This shows that the referential range of *jibun* cannot be accounted for simply by syntactic constraints and that adding some semantic/pragmatic factors to a basically syntactic explanation is insufficient. Approximately twenty years have passed since Kameyama and Kuno made their proposals, and yet no recent syntactic accounts contain any more plausible arguments. What is required is some mechanism that can represent “context” properly and can explain how plausibility is computed.

For this purpose, attempts by Artificial Intelligence researchers to formalise the notion of context appear useful. The most widely used framework is the one proposed by John McCarthy (e.g. McCarthy 1983 & 1996; McCarthy and Buvac 1997). This work, however, as its main proponent admits, remains “incomplete and tentative” (McCarthy and Buvac 1997: 14; see de Paiva 2003 for more problems related to formalisation). I shall merely point out at this stage that the notion of ‘outer context’ (i.e. c_0 in McCarthy and Buvac 1997) can be used to represent the above-mentioned possibility of *jibun* referring to the speaker or author of an entire sentence.

References:

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