

Case Marking in Desiderative Constructions

Stefan Kaufmann

Kyoto University

kaufmann@pine.kuee.kyoto-u.ac.jp

Misa Miyachi

Stanford University

misa@stanford.edu

Abstract

Students are taught early on in the curriculum that the objects of verbs ending in ‘-tai’ may be marked with ‘ga’, but not what difference ‘ga’ makes and when it should not be used. Reviewing and building on work on lexical and semantic restrictions on the use of ‘ga’, we argue that in addition its use has clearly discernible pragmatic conditions and effects. An understanding of these effects facilitates our theoretical understanding of the alteration and helps to improve its presentation in the classroom.

Example

ビール が/を 飲みたい

beer ga/wo drink-desid

(I) want to drink beer.

Background

- Traditional grammar: ‘ga’ is correct.
- However:
 - both have coexisted for a long time (Matsumura 1957);
 - ‘wo’ is used far more frequently than ‘ga’ (KKK, 1964; Iori, 1995; our own observation on the Kyoto and CallHome corpora)
 - use of ‘ga’ is constrained; use of ‘wo’ is not (see below)
- if anything, ‘wo’ is unmarked
- ‘wo’ is generally safe to use for language learners
- But what should they know about ‘ga’?
- Textbooks generally portray the difference as
 - (*Japanese for College Students; Nakama; Genki; Jorden*)
 - or biased towards ‘ga’ (*Situational Functional Japanese*).
- But ‘N-ga V-tai’ and ‘N-wo V-tai’ are not synonymous.
- Students end up using ‘ga’ inappropriately and without an understanding of the difference between the markers.
- Our goal: To offer a simple, “teachable,” and fairly general account of the semantic/pragmatic difference that ‘ga’ makes.

Information Structure

- Goal of conversation: Convergence on a shared set of beliefs about the world.
 - Goal of assertions in context: Give an answer to an (implicit or explicit) *question under discussion (QUD)*.
 - A question presents a set of alternative answers.
 - To answer it is to say which of its answers is *true*.
 - Different questions present different sets of alternatives.
 - The form of a sentence is partly determined by *what question (QUD) the sentence is an answer to*, hence by the implicit set of alternatives.
 1. I want to drink [beer].
{beer, coke, coffee, ...}
 2. I want to [drink] beer.
{drink it, brush my teeth with it, throw it out, ...}
 3. I want to [drink beer].
{drink beer, take a nap, go to school, ...}
 4. [I want to drink beer].
{ }
- In Japanese:
The use of ‘ga’ with ‘tai’ indicates what set of alternatives, if any, the speaker has in mind.
Specifically: Use of ‘ga’ indicates that the reading is either 1 or 4 below.

Pattern 1

- QUD: nani ga V-tai ka
(things to V)
- Assertion: [N-ga] V-tai
- Example: [kuruma-ga] uritai
Alternatives: {car, house, TV, ...}

Sample Contexts

- A: 東京で旅館を探しましょうか。
B: いいえ、ホテルが探したいんです。
{ホテル、旅館、キャンプ場、・・・}
- 私は昨日太郎と次郎と喧嘩した。
太郎が殴りたかったけど、彼が逃げたから次郎を殴った。
{太郎、次郎}
- あのお金を取ったのは彼女だったのに、
なぜ俺が殺したいんだ。
{俺、彼女}

Pattern 2

- QUD: N-wo dou shitai ka
(things to do to N)
- Assertion: N-wo [V-tai]
- Example: kuruma-wo [uritai]
Alternatives: {sell it, repair it, give it away, ...}

Sample Contexts

- A: 壊れたコンピュータをどうしましょうか。
B: あのコンピュータ?が捨てたい。
{捨てる、修理する、売る、...}
- 私は昨日太郎と喧嘩した。
太郎?が殴りたかったけど、彼が逃げた。
{殴る、ほめる、無視する、...}
- この間お宅で切符を予約したんですけど、
今それ?が払いたいんですが。
{払う、確認する、変更する、...}

Pattern 3

- QUD: nani-ga shitai ka
(what to do)
- Assertion: [N-wo V] -tai
- Example: [kuruma-wo uri] tai
Alternatives: {sell the car, find a job, borrow \$\$, ...}

Sample Contexts

- A: 東京で友達のところに泊まりますか。
B: いいえ、ホテル？が探したいと思う。
{ホテルを探す、友達のところに泊まる、...}
- このクラスは嫌だけど、期末が近いから
そろそろペーパー？が書きたい。
{ペーパーを書く、ノートを集める、
スタディー・グループを作る、...}
- お金に困っています。親には頼めない。
何か？が売りたいと思う。
{何かを売る、友達から借りる、
銀行でローンを組む、...}

Pattern 4

- QUD: sore kara? / nani?
(what's next / what's up)
- Assertion: [N-ga V-tai]
- Example: [kuruma-ga uritai]
Alternatives: {go to Hawaii, sell cars, sleep, ...}

Sample Contexts

- 去年東京でホテルを探しているときに素敵な人に
会っちゃった。またホテルが探したいな～。
- A: どうして車の店が日曜日に開いていますか。
B: だって、車が売りたいんだから。
- このクラスは面白い。期末が近いから
そろそろペーパーが書きたい。
- 最近、全然休みがとれなくて。でも、昨日、駅で
ハワイのポスターを見たら、急に旅行がしたいって
思っちゃった。

Comments I

- *Generalization*: The function of ‘ga’ is to indicate that the intended reading is either 1 or 4.
- Parallels with ‘ga’ in subject marking (where ‘ga’ alternates with ‘wa’):
 - Pattern 1 is *exclusive* (排他; Mikami, 1963) and *exhaustive* (総記; Kuno, 1973).
 - Pattern 4 expresses *thetic judgments* (Kuroda, 1982).
- Thus Pattern 4 is suitable to report longings, sudden urges, heartfelt desires, whereas Pattern 3 reports choices that may be made reluctantly; cf. the following (somewhat artificial) sentences, as well as the related sentences above.
 - To earn credit for the class, students have to either write a paper or take an exam.
 - ✓ ペーパーが書きたいからペーパーを書きたい。
 - × ペーパーを書きたいからペーパーが書きたい。
 - ✓ ペーパーを着きたいけど、ペーパーが書きたくない。
 - × ペーパーが書きたいけど、ペーパーを書きたくない。

Comments II

- Some alternative generalizations are false:
 - Ôe (1973): Verbs denoting actions that are directed away from the speaker do not admit ‘ga’:
車 {を/*が} 売りたい。
But ‘ga’ is fine in Patterns 1 and 4.
 - Iori (1995): Definite noun phrases do not admit ‘ga’:
むしゃくしゃして、太郎 {を/??が} 殴りたかった。
But again, ‘ga’ is fine in Patterns 1 and 4.
 - These are not linguistic judgments. The sentences are not ill-formed with ‘ga’; they only describe less familiar situations.
- There is also no clear correlation between ‘ga’-marking and non-specificity of the noun phrase:
Below, ‘hige’ is specific and ‘nani-ka’ is not:
 - 先生のひげが触りたい。
 - 何かを売りたい。

Comments III

- Some grammatical constraints on the use of ‘ga’ are capable of overriding the pragmatic conditions we identified above:
 - Idiomatic constructions of the form ‘N-wo V’ are not easily affected by ‘tai’. Specifically, verbs of motion tend to retain ‘wo’. Thus 電車が降りたくなつた is odd even though a thetic reading is readily available.
 - Kuno (1973) observed that verbs derived from Sino-Japanese roots and ‘suru’ retain ‘wo’ with ‘tai’. His example: 本箱が{買いたい/?購入したい} This is related to a difference in register: Pattern 4 tends to be expressed with familiar and frequent verbs.
 - Complex predicates involving light verbs (e.g. ‘V-te miru’, ‘V-te oku’) as well as causatives and passives impose additional constraints.
- It remains to be seen whether a diachronic tendency for ‘wo’ to displace ‘ga’ is at work as well.

Acknowledgments: The first author thanks Kanae Mori for valuable discussions and gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS, Grant #P01063) and Professor Satoshi Sato's hospitality while this work was carried out.

References

- Brentano, F. 1995. *Psychology from an Empirical Standpoint*. Translated by Rancurello, A., D.B. Terrell, and L.L. McAlister. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Inoue, K. 1973. *Henkei bunpô to nihongo*. Taishukan.
- Iori, I. 1995. Ga~shitai to wo~shitai : Chokusetsu mokutekigo no kakuhyôji no yure. In Miyajima and Nitta (1995), pages 53-61.
- Kuno, S. 1973. *The Structure of the Japanese Language*. MIT Press.
- Kuroda, S.-Y. 1972. The categorical and thetic judgment. *Foundations of Language*, 9:153-185.
- Ladusaw, W.A. 2000. Thetic and categorical, stage and individual, weak and strong. In Horn, L.R., and Y. Kato (eds.), *Negation and Polarity: Syntactic and Semantic Perspectives*. Oxford University Press.
- Lambrecht, K. 1994. *Information Structure and Sentence Form: Topic, Focus and the Mental Representations of Discourse Referents*. Volume 71 of *Cambridge Studies in Linguistics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Matsumura, A. 1957. *Edogo Tôkyôgo no kenkyû*. Tôkyôdô.
- Mikami, A. 1963. *Nihongo no ronri*. Kuroshio.
- Mio, I. 1948. *Kokugohô bunshôron*. Sanseidô.
- Miyajima, T. and Y. Nitta, editors. 1995. *Nihongo Ruigihyôgen no Bunpô*. Kuroshio.
- Morita, Y. 1989. *Kiso nihongo jiten*. Kadokawa Shoten.
- Noda, H. 1995. 'Wa' to 'ga'. In Miyajima and Nitta (1995), pages 277-286.
- Ôe, S. 1973. Ganbô no 'tai' no mae de no 'o' to 'ga' no kôtai. *Bungaku Kenkyû*, 70.
- Roberts, C. 1998. Information structure in discourse: Towards an integrated formal theory of pragmatics. In Yoon, J.H. and A. Kathol (eds.), *OSU Working Papers in Linguistics, Vol. 49: Papers in Semantics*.
- Sasse, H.-J. 1987. The thetic/categorical distinction revisited. *Language* 49:19-46.
- Shibatani, M. 1978. *Nihongo no bunseki*. Taishûkan.
- Shibatani, M. 2000. Non-canonical constructions in Japanese. *Kobe Papers in Linguistics* 2:181-218.
- Tokieda, M. 1950. *Nihongo bunpô kôgohen*. Iwanami.