

# Pragmatic transitivity

## The Case of *tokoro-wo*

Stefan Kaufmann

Northwestern University

[kaufmann@northwestern.edu](mailto:kaufmann@northwestern.edu)

Misa Miyachi

University of Chicago

[misa@uchicago.edu](mailto:misa@uchicago.edu)

# Abstract

Japanese employs a rich inventory of “formal nouns” (*keishiki meishi*) to express temporal, spatial and causal relations, modality, evidentiality, and other notions. The formal noun *tokoro* (lit. ‘place’, ‘part’) has a temporal use on which it embeds a sentence to form a sentential modifier meaning ‘(just) when’. We focus on *tokoro-e* and *tokoro-wo* (*ni* is similar to *e* in the relevant respects). The two cannot be used interchangeably: *-wo* introduces a non-temporal connotation, in which the relationship between the two events is purely temporal. On the other hand, *-e* lacks that connotation. In this respect, the *tokoro*-phrase semantically plays an “object-like” role, although there is no syntactic basis for claiming that it is assigned accusative case. Instead, we argue that the *wo*-marking indicates semantic transitivity in the sense of Hopper and Thompson (1980). This case is special in that the “object” is the (stage in the) process referred to by the *tokoro*-phrase. Thus, we show that *tokoro-wo* is most felicitous in contexts in which several of Hopper and Thompson’s criteria (generally volitionality and agentivity, usually also aspectual properties) are met.

## Example

*Background:* A burglar tries to open the heavily secured door to the bank vault. The security guard happens to close the lock on this door (electronically, from his office) just before the burglar succeeds.

- (1) a. # 泥棒がドアを開けるところを、警備員が鍵を閉めた。  
b. 泥棒がドアを開けるところへ、警備員が鍵を閉めた。

•*tokoro-wo* (1a):

implicates that the co-occurrence of the events was *intended*  
(incompatible with the given context)

•*tokoro-e* (1b):

no such implicature  
(co-occurrence may have been coincidental)

# Background on *tokoro* (1)

- Formal noun (*keishiki meishi*)  
*lit.* ‘place’, ‘part’
- Temporal use:
  - takes a tensed clause as its complement
  - forms a temporal modifier for the matrix clause
  - locates the reference time of the matrix clause relative to an eventuality of which its complement clause is true
  - the temporal relation depends on aspect and tense of the complement clause

## Eventive Complements:

- [A-nonpast *tokoro*] B  
B occurs *just before* A begins  
手紙を書くところへ電話がかかってきた。  
走るところへ友達が声をかけた。
- [A-past *tokoro*] B  
B occurs *just after* A terminates  
手紙を書いたところへ電話がかかってきた。  
走ったところへ友達が声をかけた。

## Background on *tokoro* (2)

### Stative and progressive complements:

- [A-nonpast *tokoro*] B  
B occurs *while* A occurs  
寒いところへ暖房が壊れた。  
走っているところへ友達が声をかけた。
- [A-past *tokoro*] B  
B occurs *while* A occurs  
?? 寒かったところへ暖房が壊れた。  
?? 走っていたところへ友達が声をかけた。

### *Comments:*

- incompatible with individual-level predicates:  
\* 背が高いところ(へ・を) ‘while I/she was tall’
- fine with stage-level predicates:  
幸せなところ(へ・を) ‘while I/she was happy’
- with all stative complements, presupposes that the eventuality is bounded:  
寒いところ(へ・を) ‘while it was cold’  
\* 日本の冬が寒いところ(へ・を) ‘while Japanese winters were cold’
- perfective *-teiru* is coerced into a progressive reading:  
結婚しているところ(へ・を) ‘while I/she was getting married’
- past tense is very marginal, but considered possible by some speakers  
cf. 東京に{住んでいた時・住んでいる時}中野区に住んでいた。

# Particles: *tokoro-wo* vs. *tokoro-e* (1)

## I. Agentivity of the matrix subject

- (2) a. 彼が出かけるところを、奥さんが車を壊した。  
b. 彼が出かけるところへ、奥さんが車を壊した。

- (2a): She *intentionally* broke the car (to prevent him from leaving)  
(2b): No such implicature: She broke the car by accident

- (3) a. \* 彼が出かけるところを、車が壊れた。  
b. 彼が出かけるところへ、車が壊れた。

- *kowareta* is an unaccusative verb whose subject is not an agent; hence (3a) is odd

- (4) a. \* 彼女が留学するところを、母が死んだ。  
b. 彼女が留学するところへ、母が死んだ。

- (5) a. 彼女が留学するところを、母が自殺した。  
b. 彼女が留学するところへ、母が自殺した。

- *shinda*, like *kowareta*, is unaccusative, hence (4a) is bad
- With *jisatsu shita*, unlike *kowareta*, the subject is an agent; thus (5a) is good (and implies that the mother committed suicide intentionally in order to prevent her daughter from going abroad)

*Tokoro-wo* implies that the matrix subject acted *on purpose*.

⇒ incompatible with matrix clauses whose subject is not an agent.

⇒ the use of *tokoro-wo* is more restricted than the use of *tokoro-e*.

# Particles: *tokoro-wo* vs. *tokoro-e* (2)

## II. Affectedness of the embedded subject

- The subject of a *tokoro-wo* clause is not an argument of the matrix predicate.
  - Could its role be similar to the subjects of *indirect passives*?  
(formed by topicalizing the embedded subject)
- (6) a. 泥棒は、ドアを開けるところを、警備員に鍵を閉められた。  
b. 泥棒は、ドアを開けるところへ、警備員に鍵を閉められた。
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- (7) a. 泥棒は、ドアを開けるところを、警備員が鍵を閉めた。  
b. 泥棒は、ドアを開けるところへ、警備員が鍵を閉めた。
- Same semantic difference: intention of the guard in (a), lack thereof in (b).
  - Japanese indirect passives are generally *adversative*; cf. (7a) (as well as (7b)).
  - Q: Are all sentences with *tokoro-wo* phrases adversative?  
A: No. Consider the following statements about the movie “King Kong”:
- (8) a. # 彼女は、木から落ちるところを、彼に手を出された。  
b. # 彼女は、木から落ちるところへ、彼に手を出された。
- (9) a. 彼女は、木から落ちるところを、彼が手を出した。  
b. 彼女は、木から落ちるところへ、彼が手を出した。
- The passives in (8) are infelicitous, as expected.
  - The *tokoro-wo* phrases in (9) are felicitous with both particles.

*Tokoro-wo* does *not* imply adverse affectedness of the embedded subject.  
⇒ The embedded subject is not the subject of the indirect passive  
(in addition to not being an argument of the non-passive)

# Particles: *tokoro-wo* vs. *tokoro-e* (3)

## III. Transitivity of the matrix clause

- So far, we have discussed restrictions on the use of *tokoro-wo*.  
Q: Are there cases in which *tokoro-wo* is felicitous and *tokoro-e* is not?
- A: Yes. Compare (6) and (10):  
  
(6) a. 泥棒は、ドアを開けるところを、警備員に鍵を閉められた。  
b. 泥棒は、ドアを開けるところへ、警備員に鍵を閉められた。  
(10) a. 泥棒は、ドアを開けるところを、警備員によって鍵を閉められた。  
b. \* 泥棒は、ドアを開けるところへ、警備員によって鍵を閉められた。
- *Ni-yotte*-passives are restricted to sentences with high *transitivity* (Hopper and Thompson, 1980).
- Conversely, the use of *ni-yotte* in (10) signals high transitivity (i.e., agentivity of the subject).
- This is consistent with *tokoro-wo* in (10a), but not with *tokoro-e* in (10b).

- *Wo*-marking indicates semantic transitivity in the sense of Hopper and Thompson (1980).
- This case is special in that the “object” is the (stage in the) process referred to by the *tokoro*-phrase.
- *Tokoro-wo* is generally most felicitous in contexts in which several of Hopper and Thompson’s criteria (generally volitionality and agentivity, usually also aspectual properties) are met.

# References

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Transitivity (Hopper, P.J and S. Thompson. 1980)

	HIGH	LOW
Participants	2 or more participants, A and O	1 participant
Kinesis	action	non-action
Aspect	telic	atelic
Punctuality	punctual	non-punctual
Volitionality	volitional	non-volitional
Affirmation	affirmative	negative
Mode	realis	irrealis
Agency	A high in potency	A low in potency
Affectedness of O	O Totally affected	O not affected
Individuation of O	O highly individuated	O non-individuated