

Comparative Morpheme in Modern Japanese

Japanese differs from languages like English in that it (usually) has no overt comparative morphology like the English *-er/more*, as shown in (1):

- (1) a. Tokyo-wa [Sapporo]-yori atatakai.
Tokyo-TOP Sapporo -than warm
'It is warmer in Tokyo than in Sapporo.'
- b. Taro-wa [Hanako-ga kaita (-no)]-yori nagai ronbun-o kaita.
Taro-TOP Hanako-NOM wrote -NM]-than long paper-ACC wrote
'Taro wrote a longer paper than Hanako wrote.' (NM=Nominalizer)

However, in Modern Japanese, *yori* is used as the equivalent of the English comparative morpheme (i.e. *more*) in limited environments:

- (2) a. Yori ooku no nihon-jin-ga [Denver]-yori [New York]-ni sun-deiru.
More many-Gen Japan-people-NOM Denver- than New York-LOC live-STATIVE
'More Japanese people are living in New York than in Denver.'
- b. Taro-wa yori anzenna tokoro-ni sun-deiru.
Taro-TOP more safe place-LOC live-STATIVE
'Taro is living in a safer place.'

Although many studies have focused on the syntax and semantics of Japanese comparatives like that in (1) (e.g. Kikuchi 1987; Ishii 1991; Hoji 1998; Ueyama 2004; Beck et al. 2004; Hayashishita in press; Kennedy 2007), little attention has been paid to cases like (2).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the distribution of the 'adverbial' (or degree) *yori* 'more' and consider (a) constraints on the use of the adverbial *yori* and (b) why the case marker *yori* 'than' has developed the comparative morpheme, while other case markers have not.

As Martin (1988) and many Japanese dictionaries point out, Modern Japanese has developed the new adverbial usage of *yori* 'more' under the influence of translations from European languages. However, this does not mean that the adverbial *yori* can appear freely in Modern Japanese. If the adverbial *yori* is inserted before the adjectives in (1), the result sounds odd.

Constraints on the adverbial *yori*: Addressing problem (a), I argue that the following constraint exists on the use of the adverbial *yori* in Modern Japanese:

- (3) Insert the adverbial *yori* if a given sentence cannot express comparison.

For example, if we delete the adverbial *yori* in (2a), the resulting sentence must be interpreted metalinguistically (i.e. *Many Japanese people are living in New York rather than in Denver*); and if we delete *yori* in (2b), the resulting sentence must be interpreted as a simple sentence with a bare adjective (i.e. *Taro is living in a safe place*). Notice that (3) implies that 'if a sentence can express comparison, the adverbial *yori* should not be inserted.'

Reanalysis: Addressing problem (b), I argue that reanalysis (Harris and Campbell 1995; Hopper and Traugott 2003, among others) is relevant to the development of the adverbial *yori*:

(4)(A) NP-wa [NP-yori] _{PP} ADJ (B)*NP-wa [_-yori] _{PP} ADJ → (C) NP-wa [yori ADJ] _{AP/DegP} NP-TOP NP-than ADJ NP-TOP _-than ADJ NP-TOP more ADJ

In (A) the standard marker *yori* combines with its complement. However, if the complement of *yori* is unpronounced, the sentence becomes ungrammatical, as in (B). Note that Japanese allows the use of a 'null pronoun', but the case marker must be dropped along with the NP. I argue that the facts that (B) is ungrammatical, and that unlike in English, the standard marker in Japanese (i.e. *yori* 'than') precedes a gradable predicate, both contributed to the development of the adverbial *yori*, as in (C).

Selected References

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