Event Cancellation and Telicity

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1. Introduction

There has been extensive literature on lexical ambiguity surrounding aspectual properties of verbs and verb phrases (Dowty 1979, Tenny 1994, Jackendoff 1983, 1996, and Pustejovsky 1991, to name just a few). As the representative examples in (1) illustrate, a case of lexical ambiguity can be highlighted when one changes the constituents that appear with the verb.

(1) a. Bill ran in the park. Activity
b. Bill ran to the park. Accomplishment
c. Larry ate fish. Activity
d. Larry ate the fish. Accomplishment

e. Darrel painted (for several hours). Activity
f. Darrel painted Mary's portrait. Accomplishment

One explanation of the type of lexical ambiguity illustrated in (1), that given by Van Valin (1993) for example, is to derive an accomplishment from an activity by a lexical rule that adds a causative decomposition segment. (2a) and (2c), for instance, represent the Logical Structure of the activity verbs in (1c) and (1e), respectively, and accomplishments like (1d) and (1f) are derived from them by adding the underlined portion in (2b) and (2d).

(2) a. [eat'(Larry, the fish)]
   b. [eat'(Larry, the fish)] CAUSE [BECOME NOT exist'(the fish)]
   c. [paint'(Darrell)]
   d. [paint'(Darrell)] CAUSE [BECOME exist'(Mary's portrait)]

One type of challenge to telicity is the phenomenon of event cancellation. In languages like Chinese, Hindi, Japanese, and Tamil, achievement of an intended goal can be cancelled even after it is apparently asserted. So, in these languages, statements like those in (3)-(6) are all possible while their English equivalents are generally contradictory and infelicitous.

(3) Chinese (Tai 1984)
   Zhangsan sha-le Lisi lingei, Lisi dou mei si.
   'Zhangsan killed Lisi, but Lisi didn't die.'

(4) Hindi (Singh 1991)
   Usne ci'Thii likhii par puurii nahii kii.
   'He wrote a letter but did not complete it.'

(5) Japanese (Ikegami 1985)
   Wakashita-kedo, wakanakatta.
   'I boiled (the water), but it didn't boil.'

(6) Tamil (Pederson 1995)
   Kuppatiyai eritteen aanal kuppai eriyavillai.
   'I burned the trash, but it didn't burn.'

The phenomenon of event cancellation is widely observed in Japanese (Ikegami 1985, Miyajima 1985, Kageyama 1996) although speakers’ judgements may vary, and it is particularly common with transitive and intransitive verb pairs that enter into the causative alternation. In Japanese these verbs share a morphologically identical root, and transitive and intransitive verbs are derived by way of suffixation of various morphemes to the root. This is illustrated in (7).
The transitive verbs in (7) have been regarded as lexical causatives (Shibatani 1973). The semantic relation of causative vs. inchoative underlying the transitive verbs and their intransitive counterparts has been reflected in their Lexical Conceptual Structure (LCS) representations like those in (8) or by any similar lexical decomposition schema.

(8) a. transitive (lexical causative): [x CAUSE [y BECOME state]]
   b. intransitive (inchoative): [y BECOME state]

Change of state, represented as [y BECOME state] in (8a), is the goal of the event in the LCS of the transitive verbs in (7), and asserting that the event represented by (8a) took place leads to the interpretation that the change of state has been attained. It, in turn, suggests that the stated event is telic, as is parallel with the cases we discussed in (2) above. That is, as long as the attainment of a goal is specified as a part of a lexical causative verb’s meaning, as (8a) seems to suggest, it is predicted not to be defeasible. This prediction holds in English, but does not in Japanese along with the other languages illustrated in (3)-(6).

This paper, which is programmatic and hence perhaps speculative, examines lexical causative verbs in Japanese through the event cancellation phenomenon, focusing on their aspectual properties. I will then discuss implications for telicity and the semantic representations of these verbs. A view of telicity that I adopt in this paper follows the spirit of Hay, Kennedy, and Levin (1999) and Tsujimura and Iida (1999) in claiming that telicity should be globally captured, taking into consideration both linguistic forms and contextual information rather than attributing it only to linguistic forms or to a particular component of the grammar. This paper reflects one conception of the phenomenon, but of course there may be other ways to consider it along with the surrounding issues that are well worth pursuing.
(14) a. Wo zuotian hua-le yizhang hua, keshi mei hua-wan.
    'I painted a picture yesterday, but I didn’t finish it.'

    'I finished painting a letter yesterday, but I didn’t finish it.'

(Tai 1984:292)

In (13a) no resultative verb is compounded with the verb for “kill,” but once
si ‘die’ is added to it, deriving sha-si-le, as in (13b), the event cancellation
is not possible. Similarly, the verb denoting completion of an event, wan, is
added to the verb hua ‘paint’ in (14b), and the event cancellation is no
longer available.

Third, as Smith (1991) discusses in detail, Russian has a rich aspect
morphology that marks completion of an event or lack thereof by way of
perfective and imperfective morphemes. It is the imperfective morphology
that makes the event cancellation possible, as (15) demonstrate. As (16)
shows, on the other hand, once the perfective morpheme appears on the
verb in the first clause, thereby marking the attainment of a goal, cancella-
tion of the event is not possible.

(15) a. Ya otkryval okno no ono ne otkrylos.
    I opened(IMPF) window but it not opened(INTR)
    'I (tried to) open the window but it didn’t open.'

b. Ya otkryval okno no ono ne otkryvalos.
    I opened(IMPF) window but it not open(IMPF)
    'I (tried to) open the window but it wasn’t opening.'

(16) *Ya otkryl okno no ono ne otkylos/otkryvalos.
    I opened(PF) window but it not open(PF)/open(IMPF)

Thus, in Russian, the presence of the imperfective marker signals that a
given event does not reach the attainment of the intended goal state, so the
availability of the event cancellation phenomenon seems to be generally
predicted by the aspect morphology.

The brief cross-linguistic examination of the event cancellation phe-
omenon suggests that the languages mentioned thus far, though to varying
degrees, all seem to have grammaticized mechanisms that signal whether
the goal of an event has been attained or not. They take forms such as serial
(or auxiliary) verbs, resultative verb complements, and morphological
aspectual markers.

3. Event Cancellation in Japanese

Turning to Japanese, I will elaborate on several characteristics of the Japa-
nese cancellation phenomenon in more detail. More examples of event can-
celation are given in (17)-(23), where we see the transitive verb in the first
clause of the sentence and the intransitive counterpart being used to cancel
the event realization in the second of the sentence.

(17) Mado-o aketa-kedo (sabituiteite) akanakatta.
    window-ACC opened(TR)-but (rusty) didn’t.open(INTR)
    'I opened the window, but it didn’t open (because it was rusty).'

(18) Tukue-o ugosakita-kedo (omosugite) ugonakatta.
    desk-ACC moved(TR)-but (too.heavy) didn’t.move(INTR)
    'I moved the desk, but it didn’t move (because it was too heavy).'

(19) Suutukeesu-ni iretu-kedo hairanakatta.
    suitcase-into put.in-but didn’t.go.in
    'I put it in the suitcase, but it didn’t go in/fit.'

(20) Otiba-o moyasita-kedo (simetteite) moenakatta.
    fallen.leaves-ACC burned(TR)-but (wet) didn’t.burn(INTR)
    'I burned the leaves, but they didn’t burn (because they were wet).'

(21) Sentakumono-o kawakasita-kedo kawakanakatta.
    laundry-ACC dried(TR)-but didn’t.dry(INTR)
    'I dried the laundry, but it didn’t dry.'

(22) Suika-o hiyasita-kedo hienakatta.
    watermelon-ACC cooled(TR)-but didn’t cool(INTR)
    'I cooled the watermelon, but it didn’t cool.'

(23) Ookina koori-no katamari-o tokasita-kedo tokenakatta.
    big ice-GEN chunk-ACC melted(TR)-but didn’t melt(INTR)
    'I melted a big chunk of ice, but it didn’t melt.'

First, while in all the examples above and others, the verbs in the first
clause are in the perfective form, typically marked with the morpheme -ta,
event cancellation can also take place without the perfective morphology.
(24), for example, illustrates a case in which the verb in the first clause is in
the gerundive form.

(24) Kono mado-wa sabituiteiru-kara aketemo akanai.
    this window-TOP rusty-because even.though.open not open
    'Since this window is rusty, even though I open it, it doesn’t open.'

Thus, unlike languages like Russian, event cancellation is not largely con-
trolled by the aspectual morphology on verbs.

Second, when transitive sentences with lexical causative verbs appear
by themselves without being followed by cancellation clauses, as in (25),
the events are interpreted ambiguously for telicity. For example, whether
the leaf-burning has been completed or not is not specified in (25), although
the telic interpretation seems to be a default reading for most speakers.
(25) Taroo-ga otiba-o moyasita.
*Taro burned the (fallen) leaves.'

The ambiguous telicity status of (25) is reflected in the selection of time adverbials in (26).

(26) Taroo-ga otiba-o itizikan/itizikan-de moyasita.
*Taro burned the (fallen) leaves for/in an hour.'

In (26) both *itizikan ‘for an hour’ and itizikan-de ‘in an hour’ are available, allowing for the atelic and telic interpretations, respectively. Furthermore, the contrast in (27) shows that the telic interpretation and event cancellation are mutually exclusive. This is consistent with other languages discussed earlier that allow for the event cancellation phenomenon.

(27) Otiba-o itizikan/*itizikan-de moyasita-kedo moenakatta.
*Taro already burned the (fallen) leaves, but they didn’t burn.'

The ambiguous telicity with sentences having lexical causative verbs can be manipulated in other ways in order to highlight a specific interpretation. Compounding, adverbial phrases including resultatives, and verbal morphology that marks the completion of an event such as -te simau ‘finish doing X’ serve to induce the telic interpretation. Once these forms appear with lexical causative verbs, they force the telic interpretation, and hence, event cancellation leads to contradiction. Consider (28)-(33).

material-ACC cut-exhaust-but didn’t get cut
*I cut up the material, but it didn’t get cut.'

b. *Niku-o yaki-ageta-kedo yakenakatta.
meat-ACC roast-complete-but didn’t get roasted
*I completely roasted the meat, but it didn’t get roasted.'

c. *Sentakumono-o kawakasi-kitta-kedo kawakanakatta.
laundry-ACC dried-up-but didn’t dry
*I dried the laundry, but it didn’t dry.'

(29) *Humi-tubusita-kedo tuburenakatta. (Kageyama 1996:289)
smashed.by-stepping-but didn’t smash
*I smashed it by stepping on it, but it didn’t get smashed.'

(30) *Sakana-o karakara-ni yaita-kedo yakenakatta.
fish-ACC dry-to broiled-but didn’t broil
*I broiled fish dry, but it didn’t get broiled.'

The examples in (28) present instances of compounding. Verbs like tubusu, ageru, and kiri serve as the second member of V-V compounds, adding aspectual meanings to the first compound members. As the second compound member, these three in particular, describe the completion of the events denoted by their accompanying first members. The sentences including these compounds induce the telic interpretation, and accordingly canceling these telic events is not possible. (29) illustrates another type of effect that compounding has on telicity. The second compound member tubusu ‘smash’ is a transitive verb whose morphologically related intransitive verb is tubureru. The compound humu-tubusu in (29) consists of tubusu as the second member and humu ‘step on’ as the first member, and the latter describes the manner of the event denoted by tubusu ‘smash’. Interestingly, the combination of these two verbs has an effect similar to a resultative: someone steps on an object and as a result it gets smashed. This is what underlies the telic interpretation in (29). The adverbs in (30) and (31) also serve as delimiting events: the adverb in (30) is a resultative phrase and that in (31) implies that the burning event is completed. The verbal morphology involved in (32), -tyatta, is the reduced form of -te simau ‘finish doing X’, and hence it has the aspectual effect similar to the compounds in (28) in marking the completion of the event. Finally, yet another adverb moo ‘already’ in (33) suggests that the event has taken place before now, and the telic interpretation follows.

On the one hand, there are several ways to induce the telic interpretation, as in (28)-(33), and in this sense Japanese resembles other event cancellation languages. But, on the other hand, the extent to which they appear on a regular basis seems much less than in languages with serial (or auxiliary) verbs, resultative verb complements, or the kind of aspectual morphology that we observed in (9)-(16). However similar or dissimilar Japanese may turn out to be to other event cancellation languages, Japanese sentences with various mechanisms to force the telic interpretation do not grammatically contrast with those without them. On the other side of the spectrum, there are languages like English that strongly resist the event cancellation phenomenon, and we still need to explain why.
4. Telicity by Implicature

As I stated at the outset, if the attainment of a resulting state is a part of a verb’s meaning, the event cancellation phenomenon that we have observed should not be possible. That is, an essential problem raised by the event cancellation phenomenon comes from the assumption that an event described by a lexical causative verb entails an event described by its inchoative counterpart. This assumption seems correct in English, but the availability of event cancellation indicates that it does not hold in Japanese. Put differently and borrowing Talmy’s (1991) characterization, event realization is lexicalized in English causative verbs but not in Japanese counterparts. The event cancellation phenomenon with lexical causative verbs like those in (7), then, may be better understood if we subscribe to the view that the telicity of these verbs is attained through conversational implicature, as has recently been discussed by various researchers including Olsen (1994, 1997) and Hay, Kennedy, and Levin (1999) (cf. Croft 1998), rather than resorting solely to the aspectual properties of verbs, for instance. That is, event cancellation cases can be given an explanation similar to the one proposed by Hay, Kennedy, and Levin (1999) for examples like (34).

(34) She ate the sandwich but as usual she left a few bites.

The direct object the sandwich in (34) is definite, and ‘She ate the sandwich’ should receive the telic interpretation; but what follows it cancels the telicity without contradiction. Hay, Kennedy, and Levin explain that the telic interpretation of ‘She ate the sandwich’ comes from conversational implicature, and hence it can be cancelled. As a result, (34) is not contradictory. A similar range of examples with verbs other than lexical causatives are also obtained, as in (35) and (36).

(35) Sandoitt-o tabeta-kedo hanban nokosita.

sandwich-ACC ate-but half left

‘I ate the sandwich but I left half of it.’

(36) Haikigu-koosu-o aruita-kedo tukareta-kara totyuu-de yameta.

hiking-course-along walked-but tired-because halfway-at stopped

‘I walked on the hiking course, but I stopped halfway because I was tired.’

Adopting this view, Japanese lexical causatives like those in (7) are underspecified for telicity (Olsen 1994, 1997). If nothing follows, as in (25), by Grice’s conversational implicature, it is interpreted as if the intended goal is attained, and hence the event is telic. We noted that this is the default interpretation for most speakers. Such telicity, by virtue of the fact that it is arrived at by implicature rather than a part of a verb’s lexical property, can be cancelled without contradiction. That is, the underspecification of telicity and conversational implicature make it possible for these verbs to have otherwise contradictory statement. Consider a few of our earlier examples of event cancellation, repeated below as (37) and (38).

(37) Mado-o aketa-kedo sabituiteite akanakatta.

window-ACC opened-but rusty didn’t.open

‘I opened the window, but it didn’t open because it was rusty.’

(38) Tukue-o ugokasita-kedo omosugite ugokanakatta.

desk-ACC moved-but too.heavy didn’t.move

‘I moved the desk, but it didn’t move because it was too heavy.’

The transitive verbs ak eru ‘open’ and ugokusu ‘move’ do not assume an entailment relation with their intransitive counterparts, aku ‘open’ and ugoku ‘move’, respectively. When the first clauses appear by themselves, they are interpreted as the window got opened and the desk got moved, i.e., the telic interpretation, based on our knowledge of the world. Since this telic interpretation arises through implicature, it can be cancelled, and the addition of akanakatta ‘did not open’ and ugokanakatta ‘did not move’ do not cause contradiction. In these sentences, the cancellation is made easier by the additional context that provides reasons for why the intended goals were not achieved, i.e., the window being rusty and the desk being heavy. Telicity of lexical causative verbs in Japanese, thus, can be influenced by both linguistic and contextual factors. Viewed in this fashion, lexical causative sentences like (25) are underspecified for telicity, and they receive the telic interpretation through conversational implicature. Unless other linguistic markings are added to give rise to the telic interpretation, the telicity invoked by implicature can be cancelled, and event realization can be cancelled without leading to contradiction.

5. Summary

In this paper I have examined how telicity is invoked in lexical causative sentences in Japanese, and have dealt with this issue through the event cancellation phenomenon. Cancellation of goal realization has directly and indirectly illuminated some characteristics pertinent to lexical causatives. For instance, lexical causative verbs in Japanese are not inherently specified for telicity, but the telic interpretation comes about through linguistic and contextual sources. This is consistent with the view in which telicity should not be attributed to lexical properties or to a particular linguistic component; rather, telicity should be captured globally. Furthermore, lexical causative verbs in Japanese do not hold an entailment relation with their morphologically related inchoative variants. Rather, they have a semantic property that resembles conative verbs, as Ikegami (1985) originally observed. This property separates Japanese from languages like English where the entailment relation must be assumed. The issue of entailment relation in fact leads to a question concerning the LCS representations of...
lexical causative and inchoative verbs. As we stated in the introduction, the LCS representation of lexical causative verbs embeds their inchoative counterparts. This has been shown in (8), repeated below as (39).

(39) a. transitive (lexical causative): \[x \text{CAUSE} [y \text{BECOME state}]\]

b. intransitive (inchoative): \([y \text{BECOME state}]\)

The examination of the event cancellation phenomenon in Japanese discussed in this paper, thus, casts reasonable doubt to the inclusion of a resulting state, indicated by \([y \text{BECOME state}]\) in (39a), in the LCS representation of lexical causative verbs. That is, since a resulting state is not entailed, its inclusion in the LCS is not as motivated as with English causative verbs. This issue, furthermore, calls for re-examination as to precisely what should be encoded in lexical representations like the LCS, and in so doing, it seems necessary to carefully evaluate language-specific properties of verbs and of those surrounding them. For example, what seems to be common in all languages that exhibit the event cancellation phenomenon is intentionality (Talmy 1991, Kageyama 1996, Andrew Spencer – personal communication). In Japanese if the agent of the action denoted by the verb does not have the intention to carry out the event but the event instead takes place by accident, cancellation of the event is not possible. Similarly, if the subject of a lexical causative verb is not the agent of the event, as in the adversative construction, event cancellation is not available. These two situations are shown in (40) and (41).

(40) *Taro-ga ukkari/guuzen mado-o aketa-kedo, Taro-NOM inadvertently/by.accident window-ACC opened-but

akanakatta.
didn’t open
‘Taro inadvertently/by accident opened the window, but it didn’t open.’

(41) a. Taro-wa syooto-de ie-o yaita. Taro-TOP short.circuit-with house-ACC burned

‘Taro had his house burn down on him because of an electrical short circuit.’ (Oehrle and Nishio 1981:167)

b. *Taro-wa syooto-de ie-o yaita-kedo yakenakatta. Taro-TOP short.circuit-with house-ACC burned-but didn’t burn

‘Taro had his house burn down on him because of an electrical short circuit but it didn’t burn.’

Thus, a remaining challenge is determining whether or how such intentionality should be represented in the lexical representations of verbs. The exact nature of formal representations, of course, requires an examination of a wider range of linguistic phenomena, which I will leave to future research.

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