

Preface

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The Light Verb Construction in Japanese: The role of the verbal noun

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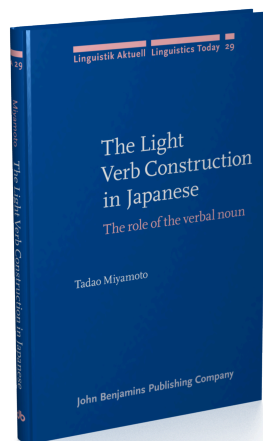
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Preface

This is a slightly revised version of my dissertation (Miyamoto 1997) dealing with the so-called Light Verb Construction (LVC) in Japanese, which consists of the verb *suru* ‘do’ and an accusative-marked verbal noun, as exemplified in (1).

- (1) a. Taroo ga Tokyo ni ryokoo o suru.
 NOM to travel ACC do
 ‘Taroo travels to Tokyo.’
 b. Taroo ga eigo no benkyoo o suru.
 NOM English GEN study ACC do
 ‘Taroo studies English.’
 c. Taroo ga murabito ni ookami ga kuru to keikoku o
 NOM villagers to wolf NOM come COMP warning ACC
 suru.
 do
 ‘Taroo warns the villagers that the wolf will come.’

Since Grimshaw and Mester’s (1988) seminal work, there have been unresolved debates on the role of *suru*: whether *suru* in such forms as those given in (1) functions as a light verb or not. An observational generalization is that the thematic array of a clause faithfully reflects the argument structure of the VN which heads the accusative phrase. Hence, from the viewpoint of argument structure, *suru* may be ‘light’ in the sense that it makes no thematic contribution to the VN-*o suru* construction. This use of *suru* may be different from the regular use of *suru* as a two-place ACTIVITY predicate, as shown in (2).

- (2) a. Taroo ga gorufu o suru.
 NOM golf ACC do
 ‘Taroo plays golf.’
 b. Taroo ga tenisu o suru.
 NOM tennis ACC do
 ‘Taroo plays tennis.’

- c. Taroo ga kaimono o suru.
 NOM shopping ACC do
 ‘(lit.) Taroo does a shopping.’

The oft-cited differences between the so-called light *suru* construction and the heavy *suru* construction are two-fold. First, in the light *suru* construction, the arguments of the VN may be ‘promoted’ into a clausal domain. Judging from the verbal case marking, the arguments of the VN are treated as if they are those of *suru*. Second, the light *suru* construction may exhibit the so-called ‘frozen phenomena’. The generalization is that when there is no overt argument in the accusative phrase domain, this accusative phrase becomes ‘frozen’ in the sense that it cannot be targeted for syntactic processes, such as scrambling and adverbial insertion.

The majority of previous studies examine the ‘weight’ of *suru* either to support or refute the idea that *suru* can function as a light verb. In other words, these studies attempt to disambiguate *VN-o suru* formations by relying solely on the lexical property of *suru*. This study argues that the ambiguity does not stem from the ‘weight’ of *suru* but from its accusative phrase: whether it is headed by a thematic or non-thematic VN. This study claims that the ambiguity can be resolved under the assumption that there is only one type of *suru*: a two-place predicate which licenses an Agent and an EVENT. In this sense, this study argues against the idea that *suru* functions as a light verb and instead argues that the characterization of *VN-o suru* formation arises not from the dichotic distinction of *suru* but from the dichotic distinction of its accusative phrase.

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