THE EFFECT OF SYNTACTIC DIFFERENCES ON ENGLISH-JAPANESE INTERPRETING: PREMODIFYING ADJECTIVES IN ENGLISH

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Abstract
In this paper, I propose to highlight the effects of syntactic differences between English and Japanese on the process of interpreting from English into Japanese. The paper will focus on one such difference, the use of premodifying adjectives in English.

Introduction
The so-called 'literal translation' is the result of a direct translation of text from one language into another in which, in many cases, the syntactic structure of the original sentence is retained. The translated passage is not natural because it does not correspond to the native speaker's perception.

From my teaching experience, I have noted that premodifying adjectives in English sentences are often significant causes of unnatural interpretation from English to Japanese. This is because a concept that in English is expressed by premodifying adjectives is not always expressed in Japanese using premodification. It may be expressed predicatively instead, or it may be expressed in Japanese by expressions involving different word classes such as verbs, adverbs and nouns.

The fact that the Japanese adjective is declinable may have a bearing on the differences in the use of premodification between English and Japanese.

The Japanese adjective is capable of constituting a predicate without depending on any other word. For example, 'atarashii' means 'new'; the idea of "BEING such and such" is included in its inflectional suffix 'i' which expresses a mode of being.

This aspect contrasts with the English adjective which is not capable of constituting a predicate without a be-verb. Such being the case, however, when it comes to modifying a noun, an English adjective could be almost "prefixed" to the noun it modifies. Therefore the phrase 'new law', for instance, is likely to be perceived as a single concept.

On the other hand, its Japanese equivalent, 'atarashii horitsu' means 'the law which is new'. This might as well be perceived as two separate units or concepts which each has its individual share of weighting or emphasis. Consequently the effect of the premodification of the Japanese adjective should reduce quite substantially depending on the type of syntax in which the adjective occurs.

Accordingly, I propose to highlight how the use of the premodifying adjective in English is restricted in English-Japanese interpreting. I will also investigate what strategies should be employed to overcome this problem.

1. Multiple adjective premodification

The noun premodifier can be itself premodified by either an adjective or a noun:

(1) new regional and local building codes

A tree diagram (Fig.1) shows straightforward
left-to-right ordering of premodifiers:

Fig. 1

We put this into Japanese based on the same premodifier ordering as in Fig. 1: because 'atarashii' occurs immediately before 'chiiki', there is a considerable possibility that 'atarashii' may be interpreted as relating directly to 'chiiki' as shown in Fig. 2:

(1a) atarashii chiiki ya chiho no kenchiku kijun

Fig. 2

One way to avoid such a misinterpretation would be to place 'atarashii' immediately before the prehead zone, as shown in Fig. 3:
Actually this English phrase was part of a passage used for a sight-translation test given to ten students. Although it was obvious from the preceding section of the text that there had existed old building codes, I do not think that any of the translations above made that point clear. But there were a few students who did so. Their translations of 'new' were not as direct as the examples (2a-c):

(2d): Koso biru ni okeru ichiren no kaji ni yotte chiho no kenchiku-ho ga aratani sakusei-saremashita.

English equivalent: Because of high-rise fires which broke out one after another, the local building legislation was made new.

The idea of 'new' was expressed adverbially. (2e): Koso biru no kasi ni kikkake to narte, chiho no kenchiku hoki ga kaizen-saremashita.

English equivalent: After experiencing high-rise fires, regional and local building codes were improved.

This student expressed the idea of 'new' by using the verb, 'kaizen-saremashita', 'were improved'. There was one other student who used the same approach.

One thing which is conspicuous among the above translations is that the basic meaning of the verb 'spark' was not expressed precisely in Japanese. The verb 'spark' should be
expressed in Japanese by its intransitive counterpart since the subject of the sentence is inanimate (Uchiyama, 1990). Here it will be '... ni hi ga tsukii' which literally means 'a fuse is put to...', or '... no dokasen to naru' which means 'prove an incentive to ...'. This requires an explanation: 'a fuse is put to WHAT' or 'prove an incentive to WHAT'. The answer to this is 'a revision of regional and local building codes' or 'chiiki ya chiho no kenchiku kijun (no) KAISEI'.

What happens here is the conversion of the premodifying adjective 'atarashii' ('new') into a noun 'kaisei' ('revision'); 'kaisei' (revision') becomes the noun head as it takes over the zone previously occupied by 'kijun' (codes') which shifts its position to the prehead zone.

'Kai sei' ('revision') is not a noun derived morphologically from the adjective, but is one which is more semantically related to the adjective 'atarashii' ('new').

An added advantage of this conversion of the premodifying adjective into a noun is the radical reduction of the weight of premodifiers, which leads to a significant reduction in the obscurity that premodification entails, as illustrated in Fig. 4.

The following is the complete translation of the English sentence [2]:

(21): Koso biru no kai sei ni yotte kaku-chii ki ya chiho no kenchiku kijun kai sei (no ugoki) ni hi ga tsuita no desu.

English equivalent: Because of high-rise fires, impetus was given to (a move towards) a revision of regional and local building codes.

(22): Koso biru no kai sei ga kaku-chi ki ya chiho no kenchiku kijun kai sei no dokasen to natta no desu.

English equivalent: High-rise fires proved an incentive to a review of regional and local building codes.

Quirk et al. (1985:1338) state that premodification is an area of English grammar where there is considerable variation among the varieties (sic) of the language. For that matter Japanese is the same, with its various syntactic possibilities. The conversion of a premodifying adjective into a noun head is just one example. Such conversion is determined to a large extent by the semantic sequence of the sentence. The examples below will demonstrate this.

As Japanese equivalents of what an English native speaker might say [3], [3a] and [3b] would be acceptable to a native Japanese speaker. However, [3c] would never be acceptable:


[3a] Sono hito no massuguna nagai utskushii kami no ke ga kaze ni nabikimashita.

[3b] Sono hito no utskushii nagai massuguna kami no ke ga kaze ni nabikimashita.
[3c] Sono hito no massuguna nagai kami no ke no utsukushisa ga kaze ni nabikimashita.

English equivalent of [3c]: The Beauty of her long straight hair streamed in the wind.

On the other hand, as Japanese equivalents of what an English native speaker might say [4], [4c] would be accepted more readily than [4a] and [4b]:

[4a] Sono hito no massuguna nagai utsukushii kami no ke ni uttori- shimasita.
[4b] Sono hito no utsukushii nagai, massuguna kami no ke ni uttori- shimasita.
[4c] Sono hito no massuguna nagai kami no ke no utsukushisa ni uttori-shimashita.

English equivalent: The Beauty of her long, straight hair fascinated me.

2. Comparison of premodifying adjectives.

Comparative and superlative degree in English is expressed by the inflected forms, -er and -est or their periphrastic equivalents, more and most. On the other hand, the adjective in Japanese does not undergo any change in form: comparison is expressed by the use of various expressions and structures which imply comparison. Compare:

[5a] Japanese: motto takai chingin (comparison (high) (wages) indicator)

Fig. 5

As demonstrated in Fig.5, the comparison of premodifying adjectives in Japanese is normally
epressed by a larger number of words than its equivalent in English; it will probably prove to be an extra burden to the listener’s/reader’s perception.

The use of a noun, particularly ‘kango’, a compound Chinese word, may prove to be an effective way to overcome this problem. ‘Higher wages’ may thus be expressed in Japanese as:

[5b] chingin (no) hikiage/josho (wage) (noun modifier) (raising)(rise)

Fig. 6

Here are some other examples:

[6] The workers went on strike for higher wages and shorter working hours:

Rodosha wa chin’age to rodo jikan no tanshuku o yokyu-shite suto ni hairimashita.

[7] I should like to express a wish for further co-operation in the establishment of better relations between Australia and Japan:

Nichigo kankei (no) kaizen no tame ni kongo tomo isso no go-kyoryoku o tamawaramasu yo onegai moshiagemasu.

[8] Australia’s future depends on the establishment of a closer relationship with Asia:

Goshu no shorai wa aija to no kankei no kyoka/kinmitsuka ni kakatte imasu.

3. Premodifying adjectives in prepositional phrases.

Prepositional phrases consist of a preposition followed by a prepositional complement, which is normally a noun phrase. Some of the premodifying adjectives in the prepositional complement may be expressed in Japanese predicatively or adverbially. Prepositional phrases expressing cause which are commonly
introduced by 'due to' etc. are a characteristic feature:

[9a] Konran wa ikanna tsushin kikan no koshon yoru mono de atta.

[9a] is the translation provided by the Japanese translator of the American classic, The Elements of Style (Aratake, 1986:150). We note that 'ikanna' in [9a] demonstrates that 'regrettable' in [9] was translated attributively:

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Fig. 7

'Due to' is expressed in Japanese by 'ni yoru mono' ('the factor caused by ...') which includes a noun. As shown in Fig. 7, this noun is the noun head, which is loaded with too many modifiers which tend to obscure each other. The conversion of 'ikanna' ('regrettable') into the adverb 'ikan nagara' or 'ikanni mo' ('regrettably') would serve to reduce that obscurity to a large extent.

[10] Even a cursory examination of any one of them reveals aspects of a far broader picture.

The prepositional phrase 'of a far broader picture' includes a premodifying adjectival phrase 'far broader'. It is the postmodifier as it relates to 'aspects'. However, it would be the appositive clause if those adjectives were expressed predicatively or adverbially:

[10a] Tanni zatto dare o totte mite ma, sono hitotsu hitotsu wa, naiyo ga jitsun haka-hirai to iu men ni ki ga tsuku no desu.

English equivalent: By examining any one of them even cursorily, we come to recognize aspects that indicate a far broader picture.

4. Premodifying adjectives with a deverbal noun.

Premodifying adjectives with a deverbal noun (nouns derived from verbs) may be expressed in Japanese adverbially by predication.

[11] We are pleased to join you in celebrating the successful completion of all arrangements for the sister city agreement.

This requires left-to-right predication when being translated into Japanese so as to assume a verb-object relationship; 'completion' is the deverbal noun stemming from the verb 'complete' and the adjective 'successful' is expressed adverbially:


(Literal) English equivalent: We are pleased to join you in celebrating the occasion on which you have successfully completed all arrangements for the sister city agreement.

Other examples can be found in examples [10] and [12].

5. Premodifying adjectives with an inanimate subject

Premodifying adjectives with an inanimate subject performing intentional acts may be expressed in Japanese predicatively or adverbially by predication (Uchiyama, 1990):

[12] Faulty pumps may cause sequential destruction of all motors.

This requires right-to-left predication when being translated into Japanese so as to assume a subject-verb relationship; 'faulty' is expressed
in Japanese predicatively:

[12a] Pompu ga furyc da to mota mo subete tsugi-tsugi ni kosho-shite koto ni narikanemasen.

English equivalent: If the pumps are faulty, the motors may break down sequentially.

Example [10] includes an example of the premodifying adjective with an inanimate subject which performs a conscious act.

Conclusion

Because premodification is likely to entail obscurity, the use of premodifying adjectives in Japanese is restricted in English-Japanese interpreting. Depending on the type of syntactic phrase in which the adjective occurs, this problem can usually be overcome:

1. **Multiple adjective premodification**
   A premodifying adjective can be converted into a noun head depending upon the semantic sequence of the sentence.

2. **Comparison of adjectives in premodification**
   The comparison of a premodifying adjective can be expressed in Japanese by the use of a noun.

3. **Prenmodifying adjectives with a deverbial noun**
   may be expressed in Japanese predicatively or adverbially.

4. **Prenomding adjectives with a deverbial noun**
   may be expressed in Japanese adverbially by predication.

5. **Prenmodifying adjectives with an inanimate subject**
   may be expressed in Japanese predicatively or adverbially by predication.

While the phrases above represent the cases in which the conversion of premodifying adjectives into other word classes can be normally carried out during the process of interpreting from English into Japanese, this still requires such conversion to be determined by the semantic sequence of the sentence.

Notes

1. These kinds of diagram are based on examples found in Quirk et al. (1985:1342).

2. Quirk et al. (1985:437) distinguish four zones, or positional ranges, of English adjectives in the premodification structure of the noun phrase:

   (I) **PRECENTRAL.** Here, after the determinatives, is where peripheral, nongradable adjectives are placed, in particular the intensifying adjectives (*emphasizers, amplifiers, and downtoners; cf 7.33*), *e.g.*: *certain, definite, sheer, complete, slight.*

   (II) **CENTRAL.** This zone is the place of the central adjectives, *i.e.* the 'most adjectival items', which satisfy all four criteria for adjective status (cf 7.3 f.), *e.g.*: *hungry, ugly, funny, stupid, silent, rich, empty.*

   (III) **POSTCENTRAL.** This zone includes participles, *i.e.*: *retired, sleeping, and colour adjectives, *e.g.*: *red, pink.*

   (IV) **PREHEAD.** This zone includes the 'least adjectival and the most nominal' items, such as denominative adjectives (cf 7.37) denoting nationality, ethnic background, *e.g.*: *Australian, Midwestern, and denominational adjectives with the meaning consisting of, 'involving', 'relating to', *e.g.*: *experimental, statistical, political, statutory.* In the prehead zone we also find nouns in attributive position (cf. further 17.113 ff.).

On the basis of this classification, we can expect the following order:

I + II: *certain important people*
I + III: *the same restricted income*
I + IV: *your present annual turnover*
II + III: *a funny red hat*
II + IV: *an enormous tidal wave*
I + II + IV: *certain rich American producers*

3. Quirk et al. (1985:1339) state that English adjectives denoting *SIZE, LENGTH, and HEIGHT* normally precede other non-derived adjectives, and that a group of emotive, evaluative, or subjective adjectives (*lovely, nice, wonderful, terrible, horrible, nasty, etc.*) usually precede other central adjectives.


5. Quirk et al. (1985:1278) draw attention to the question of direction of predication which
correspond to noun phrases post-modified by of:
"The variable 'direction' of predications which correspond to noun phrases postmodified by "of" contributes greatly to the complexity of these expressions and has a bearing on the correspondence with the genitive. If we look at it in this way, we have left-to-right predication in the following:
- the imprisonment of the murderer.
  -(someone) imprisoned the murderer [1].
- a woman of courage.
  ~ the woman has courage [2].
We have right-to-left predication in:
- The arrival of the train.
  The train arrived [3].
- The train's arrival
  -The funnel of the ship
  The ship has a funnel [4].
With the left-to-right examples [1] and [2], it seems reasonable to assume a verb-object relationship; similarly, the right-to-left examples [3] and [4] show a subject-verb relationship. These relations are more obvious in [1] and [3], where the heads are deverbal nouns, thän in [2] and [4], where the predicational relationship is covert or implicit." (Quirk et al., 1985:1278)

References