[REVIEW]

“No (da)” *ni Taosuru Eigo no Kobun*
(The Japanese *No da*-Construction
and the Corresponding English Constructions)

By Yoshio Otake, Kurosio, Tokyo, 2009, iv+345pp.

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1. Introduction

This book is the published version of the author's doctoral dissertation submitted to Meikai University. It highlights various meanings of the Japanese *no da*-construction and the corresponding English constructions hitherto discussed unsystematically, and reveals semantic and pragmatic properties of both constructions in discourse.

The most succinct way to introduce the significance of this book under review is to describe it as a thorough substantiation of Bolinger's (1977) strong claim that the natural condition of a language is to preserve one form for one meaning, and one meaning for one form. Otake assumes that *it* in the *it is that*-construction is a referential pronoun, rather than a subject placeholder which has a clausal antecedent in the previous discourse. He argues that the *it is that*-construction serves to identify previous information deductively on the basis of the speaker's store of knowledge. The author, providing convincing data from a diversity of genres of movies, dramas, radio programmes, newspapers and novels, demonstrates that the Japanese *no da*-construction corresponds to more than one English construction, including the *it is that*-construction, and other types such as the *S be (that)*

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construction, *S be NP V-ing*, and *S take it that*.

2.1. Information in the Speaker's Store of Knowledge

The Japanese No da-Construction and the Corresponding English Constructions consists of seven chapters. Chapter 1 delineates the English sentence structures corresponding to the Japanese *no da*-construction to be discussed in the book. *No da* is considered to be a sentence final form composed of a sentential nominalizer *no* and a copula verb *da*.

Chapter 2 argues that a speaker's choice between the referring expressions *it* and *that* on one hand and that between *no da* and *da* on the other crucially depends on the status of information; specifically, whether it is already-learned or newly-learned for the speaker, as well as on pragmatic factors under consideration for the hearer (p. 12):

- (1) a. I'm sorry I broke the vase. {b. *That's* / c. *It's*} all right.
- (2) a. Kabin-o kowashitesimai, doumo sumimasen.
vase-AM broke very sorry
(Lit.) 'I'm sorry I broke the vase.'
- b. Ii desu yo.
all right be Prt
(Lit.) 'That's all right.'
- c. Ii n desu yo.
all right C (colloquial) be Prt
(Lit.) 'It's all right.'

(1b) and (1c) are typical responses to apology. Following the analysis by Kamio and Thomas (1999) that the referent of *it* should be already-learned information and that of *that* should be newly-learned information, Otake explains from the pragmatic point of view the relative strength of (1c) even when uttered instantaneously in the scene of breaking a vase. The speaker of (1c) favorably accepts the apology and expresses his feelings in a positive way that relieves the hearer of the burden of having to be concerned about the unpleasant incident by deliberately choosing *it* rather than *that*, making the speaker's reply sound as if the information of the incident has already been processed and incorporated in the speaker's store of knowledge. The author claims that the nominalizer *no* in the *no da*-construction has a similar function to *it* in conveying to the hearer that the information has been integrated in the speaker's knowledge as already-learned. Thus, the speaker willingly communicates to the hearer that he does not mind the unfortunate happening at all and relieves him of his anxiety with the *no da*-construction in (2c).

2.2. Perception vs. Cognition

In Chapter 3, accounting for the half of the entire volume, the author demonstrates that the *no da*-construction and its English counterparts can be analyzed in terms of the dichotomy of *perception* and *cognition*. He claims first that the *no da*-construction can be used to denote both cognitive entities and perceptual events (p. 42):

- (3) Kanojo-wa bokuno tegami-ni henji-o kure nakatta.
 she-TM my letter-DM reply-AM (give) did not
 Jitsu-wa kanojo-wa sore-o yomi sae si nakatta
 fact-TM she-TM it-AM read even do not
no da.
 C be
 (Lit.) 'She did not answer my letter. The fact is that she did not even read it.'
- (4) a: Ano oto-wa nan deshoo?
 that noise-TM what will be
 (Lit.) 'What is that noise?'
 b: Are-wa jyoki kikansha-ga hashitte iru *n desu*.
 it-TM steam locomotive-NM is running C be
 (Lit.) 'It is a steam locomotive running.'

The speaker expresses his recognition of the circumstance on the basis of his prior knowledge by the *no da*-construction in (3). In (4b) the speaker describes the situation based on his perception of the noise with the *no da*-construction.

The author further points out that the dichotomy of *cognition* and *perception* is relevant for the choice of particles between *wa* and *ga* in the *no* clause formulated in (5) (p. 42):

- (5) [(NP₁ *wa*) [NP₂ *wa* / *ga* VP *no*] *da*]
 (NP₁ TM) NP₂ TM / NM VP CP be

The *no da*-construction denoting cognition chooses *wa*, when the NP₂ expresses already-learned information as in (3), i.e. *kanojo-wa*. On the other hand, the *no da*-construction denoting perception selects *ga*, when the event and its agent are simultaneously identified since the NP₂ carries newly-learned information as in (4b), i.e. *kikansha-ga*.

Next Otake argues that what is expressed by the single form of the *no da*-construction in Japanese is conveyed by distinct sentence structures reflecting cognition and perception in English. He demonstrates this observation maintaining that the *S be NP V-ing* construction and the *it is that*-construction shown in (6) and (7) are qualitatively different (p. 37):

(6) S be [_{SC} NP V-ing]

(7) S be [(that) NP VP]

The speaker of the *S be NP V-ing* construction in (6) identifies the spontaneously occurring event that he has just physically perceived, exemplified in (8b).

(8) a. What's that noise?

b. "*It is a steam locomotive running.*" (Otake (2002))

The identification of the perceived event is expressed with the *S be NP V-ing* construction. The word *suddenly* in (9) suggests that the event has been perceived directly and that the identification of the event was instantaneous (p. 39):

(9) Suddenly he was aware that she was crying. "Elizabeth?"
 "Never mind. *It's just me being stupid again.*"

If the event is not directly perceived, the *S be NP V-ing* construction cannot be used. For example, it does not seem probable that the speaker has directly observed *people dieting* in the following example, where the *it is that*-construction is in place (p. 40):

(10) "People look at overweight people and say, "Oh, they're lacking in will-power" or, "She can't control herself," Powter says. "That's not true. *It's just that* they're dieting, and dieting makes you fatter and weaker."

With the *it is that*-construction in (10), the speaker identifies the previous information that has been cognitively processed (p. 44):

(11) "But why after seeing Skip did you not want to help him? Especially in light of what's been uncovered about Dr. Smith." "*It's not that* I didn't want to help him, Mrs. Reardon. *It's that* I can't help him."

The *it is that*-construction in (11) is used to communicate that the information that has already been incorporated into the speaker's store of knowledge is identical with the information conveyed in the *that*-clause.

2.3. Interpretation vs. Paraphrase

Otake proposes another kind of innovative dichotomy, *interpretation* and *paraphrase*, to shed light on the semantic properties of the *it is that*-construction. He argues that although both the *it is that*-construction and the *that is*-construction are similar in that they give further information about the preceding context, they differ in the way they identify the information stated in the preceding context, and thus they show a complementary distribution as in (12) and (13) (p. 60):

- (12) Nobody has invited me to dance. {*It is that* / **That is*,} I'm not pretty enough.
- (13) He worked for more than seventeen hours a day. {*That is*, / **It is that*} he slept for less than seven hours.

The *it is that*-construction in (12) conveys the interpretation of the preceding sentence, and the *that is*-construction paraphrases the preceding sentence in (13); the *it is that*-construction gives an explanation of the previous information based on the knowledge exclusively accessible to the speaker, while the *that is*-construction offers an explanation for the previous information on the basis of shared knowledge. The author asserts that the fundamental semantic property of the *it is that*-construction is the interpretation of the previous information that has been cognitively processed based on the speaker's experiences and knowledge. This is supported, he claims, by the observation that the referential pronoun *it* in the *it is that*-construction marks the preceding information as already incorporated into the speaker's store of knowledge. This also implies that the speaker supposes the preceding information is not easily accessible to the hearer. Following Bolinger's (1972) observation that the complementizer *that* does not appear in the sentence whose information is easily recognized by the hearer, the author claims that the complementizer *that* cannot emerge on the surface of the *that is*-construction, since the information introduced by this construction is easily accessible to the hearer. He also points out that the semantic concept such as 'cause' or 'reason' associated with the *it is that*-construction is only one of the specific meanings of this construction derived from the speaker's interpretation of the preceding context.

Otake further clarifies the semantic properties of the *it is that*-construction by examining the possibilities of co-occurrence with epistemic modals which express the speaker's attitude (p. 63):

- (14) a. Nobody has invited me to dance. *It* {*must/may/might/could*} *be that* I'm not pretty enough.
- b. Nobody has invited me to dance. *It* {**will/*would/*can/*should/*ought to*} *be that* I'm not pretty enough.

The acceptability of the modals in (14a) indicates that the interpretation of the preceding information can be made through a deduction, which is based on direct or indirect evidence (= *must*) or a factual possibility (= *may/might/could*). The unacceptability of those in (14b), on the other hand, suggests that identification of the preceding information cannot be made based on a prediction (= *will/would*), a theoretical possibility (= *can*) or the possibility that the speaker is explicitly denying or doubting the truth of the conclusion

that he has arrived at on the basis of the shared information (= *should/ought to*).

2.4. Pragmatics of the *It is that*-Construction

What interests the reviewer in Chapter 3 is the pragmatic functions of the *it is that*-construction that the author elucidates through scrutinizing naturally occurring data in discourse. First, the *it is that*-construction is used to reveal the true state of affairs and to avert misunderstanding, or to make an excuse or apology as in (15). This is due to the function of this construction, which enables the speaker to explain, through interpreting the preceding information based on his knowledge, the circumstances that the hearer cannot identify. It is worth noting that a defensive expression such as ‘don’t get me wrong’ is used in (15a) (pp. 67, 69):

- (15) a. Don’t get me wrong: I’m not interested in dissing Kitty here. *It’s just that* I’ve long been fascinated by Japan’s cult of cuteness—it’s rather like an obsession.
- b. I must apologize for my behavior in the office, *it’s just that* your appearance was a bit of a shock to me.

Second, the *it is that*-construction is often used in a context where the speaker wants to assure the hearer or to assuage his apprehension by showing that he, the speaker of this construction, in interpreting the previous information based on his knowledge, and is thus taking responsibility for his interpretation (pp. 71–72):

- (16) a. “Nothing’s any different than it was a minute ago.” “I know that,” he assured me. “*It’s just that* this time I’ve lowered my standards.”
- b. “My confidence is back, I’m believing in myself. I mean *it’s not that* I’ve lost confidence, *it’s just that* I was having some tough practices,” she added.

The author points out that the *it is not that*-construction is often used immediately before the *it is that*-construction to disaffirm the hearer’s possible misunderstanding and then to relieve his anxiety as in (16b).

Finally, since the *it is that*-construction conveys information that is not well known to the hearer and difficult for him to access, it sometimes may evoke the hearer’s negative feelings regarding the speaker, who may sound dogmatic, arrogant, and even preachy to him. The author argues that the use of the adverb *just* adds the pragmatic function of toning down and softening the speaker’s assertion and thus contributes to maintaining favorable relations, and that by using *just* the speaker can make positive efforts to

evade the appearance of bragging about his knowledge, or of emphasizing the hearer's lack of information. This is why *just* comes in with the *it is that*-construction so often as in (17) (p. 82):

- (17) "As soon as possible," Laurie encouraged, "I don't mean to be a bother. *It's just that* I'm more convinced than ever that a contaminant of some sort is involved. If there is, I want to find it." "If it's there, we'll find it. Just give us a chance, for Chrissake." "Thanks," Laurie said. "I'll try to be patient. *It's just that—*" "I know, I know," John interrupted. "I get the picture already. Please!"

Now let us look at the author's observations regarding similarities and differences between the *it is that*-construction and the *no da*-construction. Neither of these constructions can be uttered in discourse initial position (p. 49):

- (18) a. Oh! I have no money.
       b. Oh! *It is that I have no money.
 (19) a. Are! Okane-ga nai.
       Oh no, money-NM not
       (Lit.) 'Oh no! I have no money.'
       b. Are! *Okane-ga nai n da
       Oh no, money-NM not C be

Both the *it is that*-construction and the *no da*-construction stipulate a preceding context or situation that the following constructions interpret. They are different, however, in that the *it is that*-construction requires a linguistically overt antecedent, while the *no da*-construction permits both a linguistic and a nonlinguistic antecedent (p. 49):

- (20) [The speaker scratches his leg.]
       a. Ka ni sasareta n desu.
       mosquito by was bitten C be
       (Lit.) 'I was bitten by a mosquito.'
       b. I was bitten by a mosquito.
       c. *It is that I was bitten by a mosquito.

It is very interesting that Otake argues that the difficulty of co-occurrence of the Japanese paraphrase expression *sunawachi*, which means 'that is,' and the *no da*-construction can be explained by the same functional constraint discussed above (cf. (12) and (13)) that the *that is*-construction cannot license the presence of the complementizer *that* (p. 148):

- (21) Kokkai-wa   niin   kara naru.   *Sunawachi*,
 Diet-TM   two chambers   of   consist That is,
 shuugiin   to   sangiin
 the House of Representative and Counsilors
 {a. *de aru* / b. ?*na no de aru*}
 {   be   be C be }
 (Lit.) 'The Diet consists of two chambers. That is, the House of
 Representatives and Councilors.'

The low acceptability in (21b) illustrates that the *no da*-construction, like the *it is that*-construction, cannot convey information that merely paraphrases the preceding context. This is further confirmed by the fact that adverbials expressing the logical consequence or gist of the preceding information (e.g. *tumari* (in conclusion) / *kekkyoku* (in the long run) / *yousuruni* (after all) and those expressing the truth of the matter (e.g. *fujitsu* (in fact) / *jis-sai* (in truth)) can occur in the *no da*-construction that identifies cognitively processed information incorporated in the speaker's store of knowledge (p. 149):

- (22) Sono shouhin-wa yoku ureteiru. *Tsumari*-wa
 that product-TM well sells conclusion-TM
 shouhisha no niizu-ni atteiru *no da*.
 consumers POSS needs-DM meet C be
 (Lit.) 'That product sells well. The conclusion is that it meets
 the needs of consumers.'

Recall that the main clause subject is seldom articulated overtly in the *no da*-construction as in (5a) above. Otake points out that a similar phenomenon can be observed in the case of the *it is that*-construction (p. 145):

- (23) "Did you ever try Prozac?" Edward asked. Kim turned to
 look at Edward. "Never!" she said. "Why would I take
 Prozac?" "*Just that* you mentioned you had both anxiety and
 shyness," Edward said. "Prozac could have helped both."

The main clause subject *it* and the copula *be* are omitted in (23). Otake explains this phenomenon from the viewpoint of the speaker's pragmatic consideration for the hearer. Since the *it is that*-construction sometimes sounds dogmatic or arrogant with the referential pronoun *it* marking the preceding information as already incorporated into the speaker's store of knowledge, and implying the prior information is hard to access for the hearer, the speaker may try to avoid entailing or calling attention to the hearer's ignorance, information gaps or the order of superiority of knowledge by omitting the main clause subject *it* and the copula *be*.

2.5. Other Arguments and Cross-linguistic Analyses

In the rest of Chapter 3, Otake critically argues against the analysis (e.g. Bolinger (1972), Carlson (1983)) that the *it is that*-construction is considered to be a type of cleft sentence by demonstrating that this construction has syntactic and semantic properties which are not compatible with those of the cleft sentence. The author also scrutinizes the functional properties of the *S take it that*-construction. He claims that the fundamental semantic property of this construction is to convey to the hearer that the proposition manifested in the *that*-clause has been cognitively processed and is already incorporated into the speaker's store of knowledge. Thus, the *S take it that*-construction, revealing to the hearer the speaker's process of understanding the state of affairs, is often used to convey what is not easily accessible, such as the hearer's concealed or real intention, preferences, and personal experiences (pp. 173–174):

- (24) a. I *take it* then, *that* you don't like black people?
       b. Q: Therefore, I *take it that* you would not be able to testify
           as to whether he attended that party, is that right?
           A: No, I couldn't testify that he was there.
       c. You say—do I *take it that* you believe that Bill Clinton is an
           asset to the Democratic Party?

In the remaining chapters Otake discusses the semantic and functional properties of (i) the *it is not that*-construction and the *not that* construction (Chapter 4), (ii) the *which is it* interrogatives, the *why is it that* interrogatives, and the *how is it* interrogatives (Chapter 5), and he brings forward (i) contrastive studies on the Japanese conjunction *node* (because), the *now that*-clause and the *in that*-clause (Chapter 6), and (ii) the analyses of the constructions equivalent to the *no da*-construction observed in the languages of the world (Chapter 7).

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, the reviewer would like to emphasize how detailed and convincing Otake's analyses are and to point out how much natural data from a variety of sources he has examined to justify his proposals. This book offers descriptively and theoretically sufficient explanations of various meanings of the *no da*-construction and its corresponding English constructions, which have not received much attention in previous studies. Thus, the author is remarkably successful in clarifying the semantic and pragmatic properties of these constructions. One of the noteworthy features of this

book is that the author provides a Japanese translation to every example including lengthy passages. He expresses his hope to contribute to the latest pioneering research in Japanese linguistics for which he also includes a detailed index. This book will undoubtedly inspire its readers. It is our turn now to expand and enrich the analyses laid out in this book.

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