

Double-subject and complex-predicate constructions*

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Abstract

Double-subject constructions in Japanese are analyzed from the standpoint of cognitive grammar. Their characterization in this framework, based on reference-point relationships and other independently attested phenomena, is unproblematic. Several grammatical properties indicate that the expressions in question—consisting of an outer subject juxtaposed with a nuclear clause—actually represent two distinct classes of constructions: double-subject constructions (properly called) and complex-predicate constructions (with just a single subject). It is argued that both types involve the same basic conceptual configuration, from which complex predicates arise in particular circumstances. When the nuclear clause has insufficient conceptual autonomy, inherently invoking the outer subject as a reference point, the nuclear predicate and the reference-point relationship profiled at the higher level of organization collapse into a single, complex predicate.

Keywords: double-subject construction; complex predicate; cognitive grammar; Japanese; reference point; topic.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon commonly referred to as “double-subject constructions” poses numerous descriptive and theoretical challenges. Considerable progress toward meeting those challenges has been realized in research carried out from the standpoint of cognitive grammar (CG). Langacker 1999b (also to appear) proposed a basic analysis of double-subject constructions and showed that their description in cognitive grammar is revealing and straightforward. A comprehensive treatment of the Japanese phenomenon by Kumashiro (2000) demonstrated the existence of numerous constructional variants and detailed their structural properties,