

Direct Perception Expression in Japanese and Chinese¹

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Abstract

This paper tackles the adjective distribution in two different languages, Altaic language: Japanese and Sino-Tibetan language: Chinese. The findings bring us to the point that Japanese direct perception expression tolerates both open-scale and closed-scale adjectives. Chinese direct perception expression only licenses ‘totally open-scale adjectives’ and rule out ‘upper closed-scale adjectives’, ‘totally closed-scale adjectives’, ‘lower closed-scale adjectives’. The failure of Chinese closed-scale AP in direct perception expression lies in that the perception verb *jian* ‘to see’ is subjective. Open-scale adjectival perception verb complements in German and Chinese may invite temporary predications only by the addition of syntactic context, thus enabling the German/Chinese perception verb *sehen, kanjian /jian* to make a conceptualisation of the perceived event, offering an ‘evaluation’ or ‘interpretation’.

Keywords: Scalar structure, Direct perception expression, Japanese, Chinese

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1. Introduction

Japanese is deemed an Altaic language. The syntactic structure of direct perception expressions can be conveyed by a gerund VP (1a); an adjectival complement (1b) or a mimetic word (1c):

(1) a. Taroo ni wa Hanako ga **yasete** mieta. (gerund VP)
 Taroo DAT TOP Hanako NOM thin see.PAST
 ‘Taroo saw Hanako had become thinner.’

b. Taroo ni wa Hanako ga **hosoku** mieta. (adjectival complement)
 Taroo DAT TOP Hanako NOM slim see.PAST
 ‘Taroo saw Hanako is slim.’

c. Taroo ni wa Hanako ga **garigari** ni mieta. (mimetic word)
 Taroo DAT TOP Hanako NOM thin DAT see.PAST
 ‘Taroo saw Hanako is thin.’

(Examples taken from Takezawa 2011)

(1b), i.e. the direction perception expression denoted by an adjectival complement will be focus of this study.

Furthermore, there are two perception verbs in Japanese, i.e. 見える and 見る. 見える is unaccusative verb and means some view leaps to the eyes. The subject is usually inanimate or a scene. As a matter of fact, it is the object of verb 見る. 見る ‘to see’, on the other hand, is a transitive verb. The subject is the observer and usually animate. Essentially, because 見る simply delivers a perceived event or a state. In this regard, the perception expressions conveyed by 見る are objective. 見る is incapable to fulfill a metaphorical interpretation whilst 見える could. When a metaphorical interpretation is required, 見える co-occur with the modal verb ように, i.e. ~ように見える; or the auxiliary ~そうに, i.e. ~そうに見える. Again, the subject must be some scene or an event².

Chinese is alleged a Sino-Tibetan language. Adjectives are of three variations, i.e. (i) one-syllable adjective, e.g. 好 *hao* ‘good’ (2); (ii) two-syllable adjectives, e.g. 干净 *ganjing* ‘clean’ (3); (iii) overlapping of two-syllable adjectives, e.g. 干干净净 *ganganjingjing* ‘clean’ (4).

(2) One-syllable adjective

Mama kao **hao** le dangao.
 mother bake Resultative complement PERF cake
 ‘Mother has baked the cake.’

(3) Two-syllable adjectives

Mama xi **gan-jing** le yifu.
 mother wash dry-clean PERF clothes

² A salient feature of the Japanese language resides in that it favours inanimate subjects, apart from perception expression, change-of-state events are often rendered by intransitive verbs, e.g. *doa-ga-hiraita* ‘the door opened’ is more preferred than *doa-wo-hiraita* ‘opened the door’.

‘Mother has done the laundry.’

(4) Overlapping of two-syllable adjectives

Mama ba yifu xi de **gangan-jingjing**.
 mother BA clothes wash ADV dry-dry-clean-clean
 ‘Mother has done the laundry perfectly.’

There are two perception verbs in Chinese, i.e. 看见 *kàn-jìàn* ‘see-see’ and 见 *jìàn* ‘see’. 看见 *kàn jìàn* is a predicate-complement compound verb, the first constitute 看 *kàn* conveys the action ‘to see’ and the second constitute 见 *jìàn* renders the result of the action, ‘see something’. Incorporating this, the compound perception verb 看见 *kàn jìàn* is objective, denoting a physical behaviour. 见 *jìàn* is a mono-syllabic word. It emphasises on the result of perceiving ‘what’. Sometimes, it involves the feedback of the perceived things. In this regard, 见 *jìàn* is somehow subjective.

Regarding direct perception expression, three grammatical elements are confirmed possible to denote the result, a VP (5a); an adjectival complement (5b), a prepositional phrase (5c).

- (5) a. 张三 看见/见 他 买 衣服. (infinitival VP)
 Zhangsan kanjian/jian ta mai yifu
 Zhangsan see-see/see him buy clothes
 ‘Zhangsan saw him buying clothes.’
- b. 张三 看见/见 他 醉. (adjectival complement)
 Zhangsan see-see/see him drunk
 ‘Zhangsan saw him drunk.’
- c. 张三 看见/见 他 在酒吧. (locative adjunct)
 Zhangsan see-see/see him in the pub
 ‘Zhangsan saw him in the pub.’

One issue in particular is worthy of discussion. When an AP conveys the result of a direct perception expression, it has to be in a certain tense, i.e. past tense or progressive tense. Adjectives such as 裸 *luǒ* naked cannot appear as direct perceptual complement (6a) unless adding a ‘progressive tense’ (6b) or a past tense (6c) or a supplement with an object (6d).

- (6) ?a. 张三 见 他 裸. (unnatural)
 Zhangsan jian ta luǒ
 Zhangsan see-PAST him naked
 ‘Zhangsan saw him naked.’
- b. 张三 见 他 裸 着. (well-formed)
 Zhangsan jian ta luǒ zhe
 Zhangsan see-PAST him naked-PROG
 ‘Zhangsan saw him being naked.’
- c. 张三 见 他 裸 了. (well-formed)
 Zhangsan jian ta luǒ le

Zhangsan see-PAST him naked-PAST
'Zhangsan saw him naked.'

d. 张三 见 他 裸 着 上半身. (well-formed)

Zhangsan jian ta luo zhe shang-ban-shen

Zhangsan see him naked-PROG upper body

'Zhangsan saw him being half naked.'

These are preliminary illustrations that inspire us to investigate the phenomenon in more depth.

This paper compares adjectives distribution in direct perception expression, with focus upon Japanese and Chinese. Analysis shall be based upon the framework: scale structure (c.f. Kennedy and McNally 2005, Wechsler 2005, Levin 2010).

2. Adjective Distribution in Japanese Direct Perception Expression

Our starting point is adjective distribution in Japanese direct perception expression. Traditional Japanese linguists consider Japanese adjectives as falling into two groups, i.e. *i*-adjectives (c.f. 7) and *na*-adjectives (c.f. 8).

(7) Taroo wa gomu o **nagaku** nobashita. (*i*-adjective)
Taroo TOP rubber ACC long stretch.PAST
'Taroo stretched the rubber long.'

(8) John ga musuko o **joobu ni** sodateta. (*na*-adjective)
John NOM son ACC tough COP bring up.PAST
'John brought up his son; his son turns out to be tough.'

(Examples are taken from Uegaki 2009)

This study tentatively reclassifies Japanese adjectives into open-scale adjective and closed-scale adjective. An open-scale adjective predicate is 'ku', e.g. *takai* → *takaku*. The predicate of a closed-scale is 'ni', e.g. *massugu* → *massugu ni*. In light of this, we are in a better position to see how adjectives distribute in direct perception expression.

First of all, open-scale APs appear to be licensed, as in (9).

(9) Direction perception expression rendered by open-scale AP

Taroo ni wa Hanako ga **hosoku** mieta. (well-formed)

Taroo DAT TOP Hanako NOM slim see.PAST

'Taroo saw Hanako is slim.'

(example taken from Takezawa 2011)

Note that the direct perception expression is in the sub clause. The subject of the expression is not 'Hanako' herself. It is the scene, i.e. 'Hanako is slim', that is the subject. Most importantly, the perception verb 見える *mieru* here indicates the evaluation of the scene: Hanako is slim (it could be false: Hanako is actually fat. But to Taroo, Hanako is slim). In this regard, Japanese 見える can be subjective. Its transitive pair, i.e. 見る *miru* 'to see', is

improper in such expression. Another illustration of direction perception expression rendered by open-scale AP is provided in (10).

(10) Direction perception expression rendered by open-scale AP

Aki wa sora ga tooku mieru. (well-formed)
 fall TOP sky NOM distance see
 ‘In fall, the sky appears high.’

Closed-scale AP seems welcome by a direct perception expression, as in (11).

(11) Direction perception expression rendered by closed-scale AP

a. Taroo wa kaminoge ga makkuro ni mieru. (well-formed)
 Taroo TOP hair NOM extremely black COP see.
 ‘Taroo’s hair seems very black.’

b. Asa no Dooro wa massugu ni mieru. (well-formed)
 morning GEN road TOP extremely straight COP see
 ‘The road in the morning seems very straight.’

Bear in mind that *ni* in (11) functions as a copular. The AP-complement and the copula *ni* is a whole predication.

3. Adjective distribution in Chinese direct perception expression

Having demonstrated the sensitivity of APs in Japanese direct perception, this section moves on to Chinese.

First, totally closed-scale AP seems to find oddness in direct perception expressions, c.f. (12):

(12) **Totally closed-scale AP**

? 张三 见 他 裸. (unnatural)
 Zhangsan jian ta luo
 Zhangsan see him naked
 ‘Zhangsan saw him naked.’

The failure of (12) is probably down to the nature of the perception verb 见 *jian* ‘see’, which is subjective, offering an evaluation or interpretation of a perceived event. The ungrammaticality of (12), if added with a tense or a syntactic context, can be improved, c.f. (13).

(13) 张三 见 他 裸 了. (well-formed)
 Zhangsan jian ta luo le
 Zhangsan see-PAST him naked-PAST
 ‘Zhangsan saw him naked.’

Note that in (13), the past tense marker 了 *le* functions at the perceptual complement, not the main sentence. Given this, the complement 他裸了 *ta luo le* ‘(saw) him naked’ in (13) is not a bare AP, but a VP, licensing (a) an external argument (他裸 *him naked*); thus the sub clause

is an eventuality expression; (b) this event (*being naked*) is perceived. This embodies the idea that the Chinese perception verb represents an eventuality as well as a perception action. This can be further evidenced by (14) and (15).

(14) 张三 见 他 裸 着. (well-formed)

Zhangsan jian ta luo zhe
Zhangsan see-PAST him naked-PROG
'Zhangsan saw him being naked.'

(15) 张三 见 他 裸 着 上半身. (well-formed)

Zhangsan jian ta luo zhe shang-ban-shen
Zhangsan see him naked-PROG upper body

The progressive marker 着 *zhe* 'being naked' and the adjunct 着上半身 *zhe shang ban shen* 'being half naked' all function at the sub clause, enabling the perception expression from a STATE to an EVENTUALITY.

This view can be further supported by a totally-closed scale AP 死 *si* 'die'.

(16) ?a. 张三 见 狗 死. (unnatural)

Zhangsan see dog dead
'Zhangsan saw the dog dead.'

b. 张三 见 狗 死了/死着. (tense addition: well-formed)

Zhangsan see dog die-PAST/dead-PROG
'Zhangsan saw the dog died/being dead by the road.'

c. 张三 见 狗 死在路边. (adjunct addition: well-formed)

Zhangsan see dog dead by the road
'Zhangsan saw the dog dead by the road.'

Closed-scale adjectival perception verb complements in Chinese may invite temporary predications with the addition of syntactic context, thus enabling the perception verb 见 to make a conceptualisation of the perceived event.

Next, the combination of a lower closed-scale AP and perception verb seems unnatural. It can be improved when supplied with an extra adjective that indicates the perceiver's viewpoint, e.g. 旧 *jiu* 'shabby'.

(17) **Lower closed-scale AP**

?a. 张三 见 房屋 破. (unnatural)

Zhangsan see house broken
'Zhangsan saw the house shabby.'

c.f. 张三 见 房屋 破旧. (well-formed)

Zhangsan see house broken-shabby
'Zhangsan saw the house shabby.'

Upper closed-scale AP fails to appear in direct perception expression.

(18) Upper closed-scale AP

*张三 见 树叶 密. (ill-formed)
Zhangsan see leaves thick
'Zhangsan saw the leaves turn thick.'

Totally open-scale AP appears well-formed in direct perception expression.

(19) Totally open-scale AP

a. 张三 见 井 深. (well-formed)
Zhangsan see leaves thick
'Zhangsan saw the well deep.'

b. 张三 见 河 宽. (well-formed)
Zhangsan see river wide
'Zhangsan saw the river wide.'

Now we arrive at a primarily conclusion: Chinese adjective in direct perception expression distribute as follows:

Totally open-scale AP:	○
Totally closed-scale AP and Lower closed-scale AP:	unnatural
Upper closed-scale AP:	×

4. Summary

This paper has delved into adjective distribution in two different languages, Altaic language: Japanese and Sino-Tibetan language: Chinese. The findings reveal that Japanese direct perception expression tolerates both open-scale and closed-scale adjectives. Chinese direct perception expression only licenses 'totally open-scale adjectives' and rule out 'upper closed-scale adjectives', 'totally closed-scale adjectives', 'lower closed-scale adjectives'. Table 1 summarises the diversity.

Table 1. Japanese and Chinese adjectives in direct perception constructions

Scalar property	Japanese	Chinese
Totally open scale	○	○
Lower closed scale	○	unnatural
Upper closed scale	○	×
Totally closed scale	○	unnatural

The failure of Chinese closed-scale AP in direct perception expression lies in that the perception verb *jian* ‘to see’ is subjective. This feature resembles German perception verb *sehen*. The ill-formed perception German expression ‘Mary sah den Jungen traurig (Mary saw the boy sad) can also be improved by supplying with an adverb or a syntactic context, i.e.

- (8) Mary sah den Jungen traurig am Tisch sitzen.
Mary see-PAST the boy sad at table sit
‘Mary saw the boy sitting at the table, looking sad.’

Open-scale adjectival perception verb complements in German and Chinese may invite temporary predications only by the addition of syntactic context, thus enabling the German/Chinese perception verb *sehen*, *kanjian* /*jian* to make a conceptualisation of the perceived event, offering an ‘evaluation’ or ‘interpretation’.

A proposal to treat the cross-linguistic variation is put forward: Chinese and Germanic languages are probably ‘Eventuality-prominent’ languages; Japanese may be a ‘State-prominent’ language. With this in place, we may explain the following puzzles:

- a) Why adjectives in Chinese and German direct perception expression find different acceptance.
- b) Why the ill-formed Chinese and German expression can be improved by supplying with an adverb or an adjunct.
- c) Why Japanese direct perception expression welcome all layers of adjectives.

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