Epistemic perspective in causal expressions
Sanae Tamura (Kyoto University)

Abstract

The Japanese verbal suffix -ru is often regarded as a 'non-past' form. When it attaches to a non-stative verb, the sentence refers to a future event. However, in a complex sentence containing the subordinate conjunctive -kara (because), clauses with -ru can refer to past events (Shen 1984, Iwasaki 1994). See (1) and (2).

(1) Sensei-ga oko-ru kara seitotati-wa sizukani si-ta.
   Teacher-nom get.angry-nonpst because students-top be.quiet do-past
   "Because (they saw) the teacher got angry, the students went quiet."  
(2) Ken-wa kinoo takusan tabe-ru kara onaka-ga itaku nar-u n da.
   Ken-top yesterday a.lot eat-nonpst because stomach-nom ache
   become-nonpst comp cop
   "It was because Ken ate a lot yesterday that he had a stomachache."  

The behavior of -ru in complex sentences is often explained in terms of absolute tense and relative tense (Comrie 1985), though such an analysis cannot account for (1) and (2).

In this talk, we will first discuss that there are two types of causals which can denote past events by 'non-past' forms: the one is concerning with perception, and the other is concerning with knowledge state. Then, we propose that the 'verb + -ru' form is a kind of modal element that marks the 'foreseeable future'. A proposition P is foreseeable at RT (=reference time) iff, in all possible worlds which are compatible with the speaker's knowledge at RT, there is some t > RT such that P is true at t. In addition, our analysis assumes that, in Japanese, we can shift epistemic perspective relatively freely.