



The Semantic Markedness of the Japanese Negative Preterite: Non-existence of (Positive) Eventualities vs. Existence of Negative Eventualities

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Abstract. In Japanese, the use of a negative preterite (past-perfective) clause (“...*V-nakatta*”) is discourse-pragmatically constrained, and oftentimes a negative nonpast-nonperfective clause (“...*V-te inai*”) is used where a preterite clause is expected. At the descriptive level, a negative preterite can be characterized as conveying that the described eventuality was plausible (though did not happen) at some past time. This work argues that the Japanese negative preterite predicate invariably expresses the existence (occurrence) of a “negative eventuality”, as opposed to the non-existence (non-occurrence) of eventualities, and that the “plausibility implication” is a side effect of this feature. It will be furthermore argued that, while Japanese nonpast-tensed clauses generally specify that the topic time is some nonpast time, this does not necessarily apply to nonpast-nonperfective clauses, making it possible for a negative nonpast-nonperfective clause to express the non-existence of eventualities in a past topic time.

1 Introduction

In Japanese, the use of a negative preterite (also called “past perfective” or “simple past”) clause is discourse-pragmatically constrained, and oftentimes a negative nonpast-nonperfective (present-nonperfective) clause with *-te IRU*¹ is used where a preterite clause is expected (Matsuda 2002, Yamashita 2004, Kusumoto 2016).

To illustrate, the preterite in (1B_a) sounds unnatural, conveying something to the effect that the speaker *could have* hired a new nurse; a nonpast-nonperfective clause is not pragmatically loaded in the same way, as seen in (1B_b) (the initial vowel of the auxiliary IRU is often dropped in colloquial speech).²

¹ IRU is a “nonperfective” auxiliary that may receive a wide array of interpretations, including resulting state, progressive, habitual, and perfect (Sect. 4).

² The abbreviations in glosses are: Acc = accusative, Attr = attributive, Aux = auxiliary, BenAux = benefactive auxiliary, DAux = discourse auxiliary, Dat = dative,

(1) (A and B are medical practitioners.)

A: Anta no tokoro, sengetsu atarashii kangoshi yatotta?
 you Gen place last.month new.Npst nurse hire.Pst

‘Did you hire a new nurse at your clinic last month?’

B_a: ??E? [**Yatowanakatta**]_{preterite} yo. Nande?
 Intj hire.Neg.Pst DPrt why

‘Huh? I didn’t hire anyone. Why?’

B_b: E? [**Yatotte (i)nai**]_{nonpast.nonperfective} yo. Nande?
 Intj hire.Ger NpfvAux.Neg.Npst DPrt why

‘Huh? I didn’t hire anyone. Why?’

(2) illustrates that a negative preterite can be naturally used in a context where it was previously plausible (from the interlocutors’ viewpoint) that the logical contradiction of the propositional content would hold true.

(2) A: Senshū mensetsu shita hito, doo natta? Yatou
 last.week interview do.Pst person how become.Pst employ.NPst
 koto ni shita no?
 matter Cop.Inf do.Pst DAux

‘What happened to that person who you interviewed last week? Did you decide to hire him?’

B: Iya, ano hito wa (kekkyoku) **yatowanakatta**.
 no that person Th after.all employ.Neg.Pst
 ‘No, I did not hire him(, after all).’

To provide further illustration, (3B_a) with a preterite predicate cannot, and (3B_b) with a nonpast-nonperfective predicate can, be naturally followed by (4a). Both (3B_a) and (3B_b) can be naturally followed by (4b).

(3) A: Yuube nomikai ni itta?
 last.evening drinking.party Dat go.Pst
 ‘Did you go to the drinking party last evening?’

B_a: Iya, [**ikanakatta**]_{preterite}.
 no go.Neg.Pst
 ‘No, I did not go.’

B_b: Iya, [**itte nai**]_{nonpast.nonperfective}.
 no go.Ger NpfvAux.Neg.NPst
 ‘No, I did not go.’

(adapted from Kusumoto 2016:117)

DPrt = discourse particle, Gen = genitive, Ger = gerund, Inf = infinitive, Intj = interjection, ModAux = modal auxiliary, Neg(Aux) = negation/negative auxiliary, NegGer = negative gerund, NpfvAux = non-perfective auxiliary, Npst = nonpast, Pl = plural, Plt(Aux) = polite(ness auxiliary), Pfv = perfective, Prs = present, Psv = passive, Th = thematic *wa* (topic/ground marker).

- (4) a. Nomikai ga atta nante, shiranakatta yo.
 drinking.party Nom exist.Pst such.a.thing.as know.Neg.Pst DPrt
 ‘I didn’t know that there was a drinking party.’
- b. Taichoo ga amari yoku nakatta kara.
 condition Nom quite good.Inf NegAux.Pst because
 ‘(The reason is that) I was not feeling very well.’

It can be said that, in Japanese, as long as negative clauses are concerned, the nonpast nonperfective is the default way to describe a situation in the past. The negative preterite, on the other hand, is subject to what can be called the “plausibility requirement”.

This work argues that the Japanese negative preterite predicate invariably expresses the existence (occurrence) of a “negative eventuality”, as opposed to the non-existence (non-occurrence) of eventualities, and that the plausibility requirement can be accounted for as a side effect of this feature. It will be furthermore argued that, while Japanese nonpast-tensed clauses generally specify that the topic time (in Klein’s 1994 sense) overlaps with or follows the topic time, this does not necessarily apply to nonpast-nonperfective clauses, making it possible for a negative nonpast-nonperfective clause to represent the non-existence of eventualities in a past topic time.

2 Existence of Negative Eventualities vs. Non-existence of (positive) Eventualities

It has been widely acknowledged in the literature that a negative clause may describe the existence (occurrence) of a negative eventuality, rather than the non-existence (non-occurrence) of eventualities (Krifka 1989; de Swart 1996; Przepiórkowski 1999; Bernard & Champollion 2018; Fábregas & González Rodríguez 2020; Higginbotham 2000; Zaradzki 2020). Among the most compelling pieces of evidence for “negative eventualities” are: (i) that a negative clause can be a complement of a perception verb like SEE, as in (5), and (ii) that a negative clause may occur in slots like “What happened is ...”, “... took place”, and “... is what they did”, as in (6).

- (5) The police officer saw Ken **not** stop for the traffic light.
 (similar examples discussed in Przepiórkowski 1999:240, Zaradzki 2020:485, among others)
- (6) a. What happened next was that the consulate **didn’t** give us our visa.
 (de Swart 1996:229)
- b. **Niedopelnienie** obowiązków służbowych przez Kowalskiego
 not.fulfilment.Pfv duties professional by K.
 miało miejsce w roku 1983.
 had place in year 1983
 ‘Kowalski’s not fulfilling his professional duties took place in 1983.’
 (Polish; Przepiórkowski 1999:242)

- c. **No** vender casas durante un año fue lo que hizo Juan
 not sell.Inf house.Pl for one year be.Pst that what did J.
 para que lo despidieran.
 so that he.Acc they.fire.Pfv.Pst
 ‘Not to sell houses for one year is what Juan did to get fired.’
 (Spanish; Fábregas & González Rodríguez 2020:740)

The ontological nature of a “negative eventuality” has been a matter of extensive debate. This work adopts Bernard & Champollion’s (2018) idea that each set of eventualities P expressible with a clause nucleus has a negative counterpart, $\mathbf{Neg}(P)$, which contains all and only those eventualities which preclude—i.e., cannot co-exist in the same world with—every eventuality in P . When P is eventualities whereby Mary leaves, for example, $\mathbf{Neg}(P)$ is something like eventualities whereby Mary stays. Eventualities constituting P and $\mathbf{Neg}(P)$ will respectively be referred to as “ P eventualities” and “anti- P eventualities”.

The incompatibility of an eventuality (a P eventuality) and its negative counterpart (an anti- P eventuality) may be accounted for with an axiom like (7), which mirrors the Law of Contradiction in classical logic.

- (7) **Axiom of Negation**
 $[\exists e[e \in P] \rightarrow \neg \exists e[e \in \mathbf{Neg}(P)]] \ \& \ [\exists e[e \in \mathbf{Neg}(P)] \rightarrow \neg \exists e[e \in P]]$

Bernard & Champollion (2018) assign a meaning along the following lines to English *not*,³ subscript E stands for “eventive”, and v is the type for eventualities.

- (8) $\text{not}_E \mapsto \lambda P_{\langle v,t \rangle}[\mathbf{Neg}(P)]$

Reference to anti-eventualities helps develop reasonable semantic representations for sentences like (5) and (6). It is an event of “anti-stopping” that is described as having been seen by a police officer, it is an event of “anti-visa-issuance” that is described as having happened, and so forth.

Now, if a negative clause may describe a negative eventuality, does it always do so? Does, say, the English adverb *not* always represent something like (8), or can it represent the classical Boolean negation, i.e. (9) where P stands for “propositional”, as well?

- (9) $\text{not}_P \mapsto \lambda p[\neg p]$

With Przepiórkowski (1999), Fábregas & González Rodríguez (2020), and Zaradzki (2020), I maintain that clausal negation may receive two distinct readings corresponding to propositional negation (= (9)) and eventive negation (= (8)). In a sentence like (10), the negation occurs in the complement of a perception verb and is forced to receive the eventive reading. In a sentence like (11), on the other hand, English *not* may, in theory, be either eventive or propositional.

³ This is grossly simpler than Bernard & Champollion’s original formulation, which implements the continuation approach to syntax/semantic interface.

- (10) Ken saw Mary not_E dance.
 ‘There was a negative eventuality where Mary did not dance, and Ken saw it.’
- (11) Mary did not_{P/E} dance.
 a. ‘There was no eventuality where Mary danced.’
 b. ‘There was a negative eventuality where Mary did not dance.’

A negative clause involving propositional negation can be said to express the non-occurrence of eventualities (NOE), and one involving eventive negation the occurrence of a negative eventuality (ONE). (11a) and (11b) are respectively paraphrases of the NOE and ONE readings of the sentence *Mary did not dance*.

I furthermore suggest that reference to a negative eventuality (corresponding to a dynamic event; see Sect. 4.3 for the case of stative eventualities)—i.e., the ONE reading of a (dynamic) negative clause—is highly constrained, and is available only when the occurrence of a corresponding positive eventuality is or was expected or at least plausible.

It has been commonly acknowledged that generally negative sentences are pragmatically more marked than their affirmative counterparts (Tian & Breheny 2019 and references therein). However, there seems to be a significant difference in the degree of markedness between sentences with regular (propositional) negation and ones with eventive negation. In a context where there has been no expectation for Mary to take a picture, let alone a picture of an eggplant, the negative sentence in (12a) would be a fairly strange thing to say. It nevertheless is judged as a true statement, if indeed Mary did not take a picture of an eggplant. The same goes with (12b), where the perception report as a whole is negated.

- (12) I observed Mary for three hours. . .
 a. She did not take a picture of an eggplant.
 b. I did not see her take a picture of an eggplant.

(13) situated in the same context, on the other hand, does not merely sound odder than (12a,b), but seems not to be true. It is not clear if it even counts as a false statement—it has a flavor of presupposition failure (see Miller 2003:297–299 and Zaradzki 2020:485 for relevant remarks).

- (13) (I observed Mary for three hours. . .) #I saw her not take a picture of an eggplant.

(14) illustrates the (extra) markedness of eventive negation with a construction other than the direct perception report. Utterances like (14a) sound not only odd but also are perceived as non-true; (14b) sounds comparatively less odd and seems to count as a true statement.

- (14) I observed Mary for three hours. . .
 a. #One thing she did was to not take a picture of an eggplant.
 b. One thing she didn’t do was to take a picture of an eggplant.

(15), which has a structure parallel to that of (14), sounds rather natural, it being commonsensically plausible that Mary could have fulfilled the described action.

- (15) One (stupid) thing Mary did was to not take her boss's warnings seriously.

In sum, it seems fair to suppose that eventive negation is much more pragmatically constrained than that of propositional negation, and to posit the following generalization:

- (16) **Constraint on Eventive Negation**
 The use of eventive negation is felicitous only if it is common ground that the occurrence of a relevant positive (“pre-negated”) eventuality has or had been plausible.

3 Proposal: The Japanese Preterite is Not Compatible with Propositional Negation

3.1 The Japanese Tense System

Japanese has a two-way distinction of tense: past and nonpast (also called present). The nonpast tense is marked with an inflectional ending: $-(r)u$ for (affirmative) verbs and $-i$ for adjectives, including negative predicates derived out of a verb with the suffix $-(a)na$ (e.g. *utawanai* in (28a)). The past tense is marked with the marker $-ta$, which I take to be a particle following an infinitive predicate (Oshima 2014).

A nonpast-tensed dynamic predicate as a rule describes an event taking place after the relevant temporal anchoring point (typically the time of utterance), putting aside the habitual/generic interpretation. A nonpast-tensed stative predicate by default describes a state co-temporal with the anchoring point, but may also describe one that holds after it.

- (17) (nonpast)
- a. Ken wa ashita Mari ni au.
 K. Th tomorrow M. Dat see.Npst
 ‘Ken will see Mari tomorrow.’
 - b. Ken wa {ima/ashita} wa Tokyo ni iru.
 K. Th now/tomorrow Th T. Dat exist.Npst
 ‘Ken {is/will be} in Tokyo {now/tomorrow}.’

A past-tensed predicate, whether it is dynamic or stative, locates the described eventuality in the past relative to the anchoring point.

- (18) (past)
- a. Ken wa kinoo Mari ni atta.
 K. Th yesterday M. Dat see.Pst

- ‘Ken saw Mari yesterday.’
 b. Ken wa kinoo Tokyo ni ita.
 K. Th yesterday T. Dat exist.Pst
 ‘Ken was in Tokyo yesterday.’

I assume that a tense poses a restriction on the topic time in Klein’s (1994) sense. (19) illustrates the case of the Japanese past tense marker *-ta*. **TT** and **TU** represent the topic time and the time of utterance, respectively. The logical predicate **At** is defined in (20) (cf. Condoravdi 2002:70). τ represents the temporal trace function (Krifka 1989:97). \subseteq stands for the temporal inclusion. The material between braces represents non-proffered (not-at-issue) content.

$$(19) \quad -ta \text{ (past)} \mapsto \lambda P[\lambda e\{\mathbf{TT} < \mathbf{TU}\}[\mathbf{At}(e, \mathbf{TT}) \ \& \ P(e)]]$$

$$(20) \quad \mathbf{At}(e, t) =_{def} \begin{cases} \tau(e) \supseteq t & \text{if } e \text{ is stative} \\ \tau(e) \subseteq t & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

I furthermore adopt the view that the Japanese nonpast tense does not code a temporal meaning, and it indicates “nonpastness” merely as an implicature arising from the absence of a past marker (cf. Sauerland 2002 on the English present tense). This supposition is not essential to the central claims of the present work, but it helps account for the distribution of the nonpast nonperfective to be discussed in Sect. 4 below.

$$(21) \quad -(r)u, -i \text{ (nonpast)} \mapsto \lambda P[\lambda e[\mathbf{At}(e, \mathbf{TT}) \ \& \ P(e)]]$$

One piece of evidence that the Japanese nonpast tense does not code temporal meaning is the observation that complex predicates carrying both a nonpast-tense feature and a past-tense feature, such as (22b,c), are interpreted as past-tensed, as if the nonpast-tense feature “gave way” to the past-tense feature.

- (22) a. **Nenakatta.** (plain/negative/nonpast)
 sleep.Neg.Pst
 ‘(pro) did not sleep.’
 b. **Nemasen deshita.** (polite/negative/past)
 see.Plt.Neg.Npst PltAux.Pst
 ‘(pro) did not sleep.’
 c. **Nenakatta desu.** (polite/negative/past)
 see.Neg.Pst PltAux.Npst
 ‘(pro) did not sleep.’

The literal meanings of a past-tensed clause and a nonpast-tensed clause will look like (23) and (24).

$$(23) \quad \text{Ken wa Mari ni atta. (= (18a))} \mapsto \exists e\{\mathbf{TT} < \mathbf{TU}\}[\tau(e) \subseteq \mathbf{TT} \ \& \ \mathbf{see}(e) \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e) = \mathbf{ken} \ \& \ \mathbf{Undergoer}(e) = \mathbf{mari}]$$

- (24) Ken wa Mari ni au. (\approx (17a)) \mapsto
 $\exists e[\tau(e) \subseteq \mathbf{TT} \ \& \ \mathbf{see}(e) \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e) = \mathbf{ken} \ \& \ \mathbf{Undergoer}(e) = \mathbf{mari}]$

The meanings of the rest of the constituents, and how they are combined with the meaning of a tense, are assumed to be as follows:

- (25) a. Ken wa Mari ni aw (the clause nucleus) \mapsto
 $\lambda e[\mathbf{see}(e) \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e) = \mathbf{ken} \ \& \ \mathbf{Undergoer}(e) = \mathbf{mari}]$
 b. $\mathbf{OP}_{\exists} \equiv \lambda P[\exists e[P(e)]]$
- (26) a. $\mathbf{OP}_{\exists}(\llbracket\text{-ta}\rrbracket(\llbracket\text{Ken wa Mari ni aw}\rrbracket))$
 b. $\mathbf{OP}_{\exists}(\llbracket\text{-u}\rrbracket(\llbracket\text{Ken wa Mari ni aw}\rrbracket))$

At the pragmatic level, the meaning in (24) is enriched into (27), where the implicated component is shaded.

- (27) $\exists e\{\mathbf{TU} \leq \mathbf{TT}\}[\tau(e) \subseteq \mathbf{TT} \ \& \ \mathbf{see}(e) \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e) = \mathbf{ken} \ \& \ \mathbf{Undergoer}(e) = \mathbf{mari}]$

3.2 The Incompatibility of the Past Tense and the Propositional Negation

I propose that the negation in a Japanese negative preterite is invariably eventive, so that, for example, (28b) allows only the ONE reading while (28a) is ambiguous. The plausibility requirement for the negative preterite can be seen as an outcome of this feature (cf. (13)/(14)).

- (28) a. Ken wa utawanai.
 K. Th sing.Neg.Npst
 ‘Ken will not sing.’
 b. Ken wa utawanakatta.
 K. Th sing.Neg.Pst
 ‘Ken did not sing.’
- (29) a. Ken wa utaw (the clause nucleus) $\mapsto \lambda e[\mathbf{sing}(e) \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e) = \mathbf{ken}]$
 b. -(a)na(kat)_P (propositional negation) $\mapsto \lambda p[\neg p]$
 c. -(a)na(kat)_E (eventive negation) $\mapsto \lambda P_{\langle v,t \rangle}[\mathbf{Neg}(P)]$
- (30) a. the NOE reading of (28a)
 $\llbracket\text{-ana}_P\rrbracket(\mathbf{OP}_{\exists}(\llbracket\text{-i}\rrbracket(\llbracket\text{Ken wa utaw}\rrbracket))) \Rightarrow$
 $\neg \exists e\{\mathbf{TU} \leq \mathbf{TT}\}[\mathbf{At}(e, \mathbf{TT}) \ \& \ \mathbf{sing}(e) \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e) = \mathbf{ken}]$
 b. the ONE reading of (28a)
 $\exists e\{\mathbf{TU} \leq \mathbf{TT}\}[\mathbf{At}(e, \mathbf{TT}) \ \& \ \mathbf{Neg}(\lambda e'[\mathbf{sing}(e') \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e') = \mathbf{ken}])(e)]$
- (31) a. the NOE reading of (28b) (unavailable)
 $\llbracket\text{-anakat}_P\rrbracket(\mathbf{OP}_{\exists}(\llbracket\text{-ta}\rrbracket(\llbracket\text{Ken wa utaw}\rrbracket))) \Rightarrow$
 $\neg \exists e\{\mathbf{TT} < \mathbf{TU}\}[\mathbf{At}(e, \mathbf{TT}) \ \& \ \mathbf{sing}(e) \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e) = \mathbf{ken}]$
 b. the ONE reading of (28b)
 $\mathbf{OP}_{\exists}(\llbracket\text{-ta}\rrbracket(\llbracket\text{-anakat}_E\rrbracket(\llbracket\text{Ken wa utaw}\rrbracket))) \Rightarrow$

$$\exists e\{\mathbf{TT} < \mathbf{TU}\}[\mathbf{At}(e, \mathbf{TT}) \ \& \ \mathbf{Neg}(\lambda e'[\mathbf{sing}(e') \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e') = \mathbf{ken}](e)]$$

The lack of the NOE interpretation of the negative preterite likely has to do with the grammatical status/position of the past marker *-ta*. Historically, the marker *-ta* developed from the auxiliary TARI, an archaic marker of perfect (Ogihara & Fukushima 2015). When a sentence with TARI is negated, the negation occurs to its right, as in (32), where *tar*, the stem of TARI, is followed by *anu*, a negative-attributive suffix (Kondo 2003).

- (32) [...] aete koto to mo **omoiaranu** keshiki nite [...]

at.all matter as even think.*tar*.Neg.Attr appearance with

'[The merchant (who was robbed by a group of thieves) was standing

on the ridge,] appearing not to think of it (= the robbery) as a big deal

[...]'

(from *Konjaku Monogatari Shuu*, estimated to be written around the

beginning of the 12th century)

The contemporary past marker *-ta* no longer retains its status as an inflecting word, and can only be preceded by negation. Some scholars, including Bloch (1946), Teramura (1984), and Tsujimura (2007), consider that *-ta* is—i.e. has grammaticalized into—an inflectional suffix directly following the predicate stem (the “attachment-to-stem” analysis). Others, including Shibatani (1990) and Shirota (1998), suppose that *-ta* is a particle or auxiliary that, like its predecessor TARI, follows an infinitive form, an inflected form capable of heading a subordinate clause on its own, as in (33a,b) (the “attachment-to-infinitive” analysis).

- (33) a. Ken wa Mari ni **ai**, hon o watashita.

K. Th M. Dat see.Inf book Acc hand.Pst

'Ken saw Mari and handed her the book.'

b. Sora ga **hare**, kion ga agatta.

sky Nom clear.up.Inf atmospheric.temperature Nom rise.Pst

'The sky having cleared, the temperature rose.'

The infinitive form of a Type I verb (i.e. a verb whose stem ends with a consonant), such as AU ‘see, meet’ (the stem = *aw*) and ODORU ‘dance’ (the stem = *odor*), is formed by appending *-i* to the verb base (which may incur a phonotactically motivated sound change of the stem; e.g. *aw + i* ⇒ *ai*). I take *-i* here to an epenthetically inserted vowel, although it can alternatively be regarded as an inflectional suffix. The infinitive form of a Type II verb (i.e. a verb whose stem ends with a vowel), such as NERU ‘sleep’ (the stem = *ne*) and HARERU ‘clear up, get sunny’ (the stem = *hare*), is string-identical to the stem.

In Oshima (2014), I argued that *-ta* can be (though usually is not) separated from the verb to its left by an accent-phrase boundary, as in (34b), and argues that this lends support for the attachment-to-infinitive analysis; in (34a,b), braces indicate accent-phrase boundaries and downward arrows indicate accent falls.

- (34) Moshi haretā to shite mo, ...
 hypothetically get.sunny.Pst Comp do.Ger though
 ‘Even if it {had gotten/should get} sunny, ...’
 a. ... {ha[↓] re ta to} ... (the default phrasing pattern)
 b. ... {ha[↓] re} {ta[↓] to} ... (an alternative phrasing pattern)

The verb to the left of *-ta* may be regarded either as the “host” or “complement” of *-ta*, depending on the premises regarding syntactic structure and headedness. I will regard it as a host for the sake of concreteness, but the choice here does not have direct bearings on the discussion.

The nonpast markers *-(r)u* and *-i*, as well as the negative-nonpast marker *-en*, on the other hand, can sensibly be regarded as inflectional suffixes. (35) and (36) illustrate the compositions of the nonpast- and past-tensed plain (nonpolite) negative predicates whose base is *aw* ‘see, meet’ posited in Oshima (2014). Plus signs and slashes respectively indicate word-internal morpheme boundaries and word boundaries; “ \Rightarrow ” represents sound change, including the insertion of an epenthetic vowel, incurred by (morpho-)phonological rules. Subscript *inf* is meant to clarify the status of the expression as an inflected infinitive form.

- (35) plain negative nonpast form
 a. Awanai. ‘(*pro_i*) will not see (*pro_j*).’
 b. [[*aw* (verb base) + *ana* (negative suffix deriving an adjective out of a verb)] + *i* (nonpast-tense suffix)]
- (36) plain negative past form
 a. Awanakatta. ‘(*pro_i*) did not see (*pro_j*).’
 b. [[[[*aw* (verb base) + *ana* (negative suffix deriving an adjective out of a verb)] + *kar* (suffix deriving a verb out of an adjective)]_{inf} / *ta* (past-tense particle)]
 \Rightarrow *awanakatta*

The key point here is that *-ta* is separated from its host, which contains the negation, by a word boundary, while *-i* belongs to the same word as its host.

By and large the same goes with polite counterparts of nonpast- and past-tensed negative predicates. In nonpast ones, the tense feature occurs within the same word as the negation; in past ones, this is not the case.

- (37) polite negative nonpast form
 a. Aimasen. ‘(*pro_i*) will not see (*pro_j*).’
 b. [[*aw* (verb base) + *mas* (bound base)] + *en* (negative nonpast-tense suffix)]
 \Rightarrow *aimasen*
- (38) polite negative past form (variant #1)
 a. Aimasen deshita. ‘(*pro_i*) did not see (*pro_j*).’
 b. [[[[*aw* (verb base) + *mas* (bound base)] + *en* (negative nonpast-tense suffix)] / [[*des* (politeness auxiliary base)]_{inf} / *ta* (past-tense

- particle)]]
 \Rightarrow *aimasen deshita*
- (39) polite negative past form (variant #2)
- Awanakatta desu. ‘(*pro_i*) did not see (*pro_j*).’
 - [[[[*aw* (verb base) + *ana* (negative suffix deriving an adjective out of a verb)] + *kar* (suffix deriving a verb out of an adjective)]_{inf} / *ta* (past-tense particle)] / [*des* (politeness auxiliary base) + *u* (nonpast-tense suffix)]]
 \Rightarrow *awanakatta desu*

It seems quite plausible that the word boundary blocks negation in the host to take scope over *-ta*, thereby inducing the differing scopal behaviors of the nonpast and past tense markers.

- (40) **possible patterns:** Neg > Nonpast, Nonpast > Neg, Past > Neg
impossible pattern: Neg > Past

Due to their semantic types, propositional negation ($\langle t, t \rangle$) must be applied after the closure of the eventuality variable, hence taking scope over the tense; eventive negation ($\langle vt, vt \rangle$), on the hand, may take scope under the tense ($\langle vt, vt \rangle$). The impossibility of the “Neg > Past (*-ta*)” pattern implies that the negation occurring in a preterite can only be eventive.

4 The Nonpast Nonperfective as an “Alternative Preterite”

The puzzle of the limited discourse-configurational distribution of the negative preterite has a flip side: the unexpectedly wide distribution of the negative nonpast nonperfective. I suggest that the Japanese nonpast nonperfective sometimes receives a “preterite-like” interpretation.

4.1 The *-te* IRU form in its Perfect Use

The opposition between the so-called *-te* IRU form (nonperfective form), and the simple form (perfective form) has been recognized to be central to the aspect system of Japanese. The *-te* IRU form receives a wide array of interpretations, including (i) resulting state (also called resultative perfect), (ii) progressive, and (iii) habitual (e.g. Kudo 2020). Among the various uses of *-te* IRU, the one that most directly concerns the purposes of the current work is the one labeled “perfect” in such works as Shirai (2000) and Kudo (2020) (alternative labels for this use include “existential perfect”, “experience (*keiken*)”, and “retrospection (*kaisoo*)”).

Providing examples like (41a–c), Teramura (1984:131) maintains that the function of *-te* IRU in its perfect use is to describe “an event in the past that has significance on the present time (*genzai ni igi o motsu kako no jishoo*)”.

- (41) a. Ano hito wa takusan no shoosetsu o **kaite iru**.
 that person Th many Cop.Attr novel Acc write.Ger
 NpfvAux.Npst
 ‘That person has written many novels.’
- b. (a police officer to a medical examiner, who has conducted an autopsy on a woman)
 Otoko wa tasukarimashita. Onna wa nani o **nonde imasu** ka?
 man Th survive.Plt.Pst woman Th what Acc take.Ger
 NpfvAux.Plt.Npst DPrt
 ‘The man [who was with the woman and found unconscious] survived. What [medicine] did the woman take?’
- c. Kasai Zeno wa Akutagawa jisatsu no yokunen,
 K. Z. Th A. suicide Gen following.year
 Showa 3 nen 7 gatsu ni **shinde iru**.
 the.Showa.era 3 year 7 month Dat die.Ger NpfvAux.Npst
 ‘[The novelist] Kasai Zeno died in July 1927 (Showa 3), the following year of the suicide of [the novelist] Akutagawa.’
 (Teramura 1984:126,132,133; (b) is originally from a novel)

A nonpast-tensed *-te* IRU form in its perfect use has a meaning rather similar to that of the corresponding preterite, much like how an English present-perfect clause is similar in meaning to its preterite counterpart (e.g., *Ken has read the book* vs. *Ken read the book*). Given this, it is tempting to suppose that a *-te* IRU form occurring in a direct answer to a past-tensed interrogative, such as the instance in (1B_b), receives the perfect interpretation (I will dismiss this view below, however).

I assume that the *-te* IRU perfect is by and large synonymous to the English HAVE *-ed* perfect. Here I adopt Parsons’s (1990) resultativity-based analysis of the perfect aspect, according to which it describes the resultant state of an eventuality, i.e., an abstract state whereby some eventuality’s “having occurred”. The meaning of *i* (the stem of IRU) in its perfect use is taken to be something like (42); **RS** stands for “resultant state”.

- (42) i (perfect) $\mapsto \lambda P[\lambda e[\exists e'[e = \mathbf{RS}(e') \ \& \ P(e')]]]$

Nonpast/past-tensed perfect clauses (43a,b) will be taken to have the meanings in (44a,b) respectively, with the derivational process schematized in (45) (the gerund marker *-te* is considered to be semantically vacuous).

- (43) Ken wa Mari ni atte {a. iru / b. ita }.
 K. Th M. Dat see.Ger NpfvAux.Npst NpfvAux.Pst
 ‘Ken {a. has (or will have) / b. had} seen Mari.’
- (44) a. $\exists e\{\mathbf{TU} \leq \mathbf{TT}\}[\tau(e) \supseteq \mathbf{TT} \ \& \ \exists e'[e = \mathbf{RS}(e') \ \& \ \mathbf{see}(e') \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e') = \mathbf{ken} \ \& \ \mathbf{Undergoer}(e') = \mathbf{mari}]]$

- b. $\exists e\{\mathbf{TT} < \mathbf{TU}\}[\tau(e) \supseteq \mathbf{TT} \ \& \ \exists e'[e = \mathbf{RS}(e') \ \& \ \mathbf{see}(e') \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e') = \mathbf{ken} \ \& \ \mathbf{Undergoer}(e') = \mathbf{mari}]]$
 (45) $\text{OP}_{\exists}([\text{-ru/-ta}]([\text{i}]([\text{Ken wa Mari ni atte}])))$

4.2 The Nonpast Nonperfective as an “Alternative Preterite”

Some instances of nonpast-nonperfective predicates appear to receive a “past-like” interpretation that is to be distinguished from the perfect interpretation.

Under the assumption that the nonperfective auxiliary in (46B_b) indicates the perfect aspect, the meanings of the boldfaced parts of (46B_{a,b}) should look like (47a,b).

- (46) (A big soccer game was broadcast on TV the evening before.)
 A: Kinoo, sakkaa mita?
 yesterday soccer see.Pst
 ‘Did you watch the soccer game yesterday?’
 B_a: Un, **mita**. Sono tame ni zangyoo mo kotowatta
 yes see.Pst that purpose Dat overtime.work also refuse.Pst
 n da.
 DAux Cop.Npst
 ‘Yes, I watched it. I refused to work overtime for that purpose.’
 B_a: #Un, **mite (i)ru**. Sono tame ni zangyoo
 yes see.Ger NpfvAux.Npst that purpose Dat overtime.work
 mo kotowatta n da.
 also refuse.Pst DAux Cop.Npst
 ‘Yes, I watched it. I refused to work overtime for that purpose.’
 B_b: Iya, **mite nai**. Mitakatta kedo,
 no see.Ger NpfvAux.Neg.Npst see.want.Pst though
 zangyoo ga atte.
 overtime.work Nom exist.Ger
 ‘No, I did not watch it. I wanted to watch it, but I had to work overtime.’
- (47) a. $\exists e\{\mathbf{TT} < \mathbf{TU}\}[\tau(e) \subseteq \mathbf{TT} \ \& \ \mathbf{watch}(e) \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e) = \mathbf{Speaker} \ \& \ \mathbf{Undergoer}(e) = \mathbf{the-game}]$
 b. $\neg\exists e\{\mathbf{TU} \leq \mathbf{TT}\}[\exists e'[\tau(e) \supseteq \mathbf{TT} \ \& \ e = \mathbf{RS}(e') \ \& \ \mathbf{watch}(e') \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e') = \mathbf{Speaker} \ \& \ \mathbf{Undergoer}(e') = \mathbf{the-game}]]]$

It is implausible, however, that the relevant parts of (46B_a) and (46B_b) are construed as being “about” different temporal scenes, the topic time set in the past (relative to the utterance time) and in the nonpast respectively. Affirmative response (46B_a) to question (46A) cannot be naturally replaced with its nonpast-nonperfective variant, i.e. (46B_a'), suggesting that the topic time has to be set in the past in this context. There is no evident reason that the same does not happen when a negative response is made to the same question.

It is noteworthy that some instances of *affirmative* nonpast-nonperfective clauses, too, seem to make reference to a past topic time. Such instances are commonly found in written historical and biographical accounts, as exemplified with (48), a part of a Wikipedia article on Mahatma Gandhi⁴ (see also (41c) from Teramura 1984).

- (48) Korera ichiren no undoo no tame ni, Gandhi wa
 these serial Cop.Attr movement Gen cause Dat G. Th
 tabitabi toogoku sareta (kei rokkai). Tatoeba 1922
 frequently imprison do.Psv.Pst in.total six.times for.example 1922
 nen 3 gatsu 18 nichi ni wa, ni-nen-kan no fufukujuu
 year 3 month 18 day Dat Th 2-year-for Cop.Attr disobedience
 undoo no tame ni, roku-nen-kan no choekikei no
 movement Gen cause Dat 6-year-for Cop.Attr imprisonment Gen
 hanketsu o **ukete iru.**
 judgment Acc receive.Ger NpfvAux.Npst
 ‘Gandhi was frequently imprisoned (six times in total) for this series
 of movements. For example, on March 18, 1922, he **was sentenced to**
 six-year imprisonment for a two-year long civil disobedience movement.’

I suggest that, on top of its perfect(, resultative, progressive, ...) use(s), IRU has a “quasi-past” use, which specifies that the topic time is in the past.

- (49) i (quasi-past) $\mapsto \lambda P[\lambda e\{\mathbf{TT} < \mathbf{TU}\}[P(e)]]$

The topic-time restriction posed by IRU in its quasi-past use conflicts with, and hence suppresses, the “nonpastness” implicature that a nonpast predicate usually induces.

To illustrate, (50a) and (50b) each have two possible logical translations (putting aside the ONE interpretations of (50b)): (51a,b) for (50a) and (52a,b) for (50b). (51b) and (52b) can be characterized as the “alternative preterite” reading. Note that “i” and “-i” respectively refer to the nonperfective auxiliary stem and the nonpast tense suffix following an adjectival stem.

- (50) a. Ken wa Mari ni atte iru.
 K. Th M. Dat see.Ger NpfvAux.Npst
 ‘Ken has (or will have) seen Mari.’ / ‘Ken saw Mari.’
 b. Ken wa Mari ni atte inai.
 K. Th M. Dat see.Ger NpfvAux.Neg.Npst
 ‘Ken has (or will have) not seen Mari.’ / ‘Ken did not see Mari.’
- (51) $OP_{\exists}(\llbracket\text{-ru}\rrbracket(\llbracket i\rrbracket(\llbracket\text{Ken wa Mari ni atte}\rrbracket)))$
 a. $\exists e\{\mathbf{TU} \leq \mathbf{TT}\}[\tau(e) \supseteq \mathbf{TT} \ \& \ \exists e'[e = \mathbf{RS}(e') \ \& \ \mathbf{see}(e') \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e')]$
 $= \mathbf{ken} \ \& \ \mathbf{Undergoer}(e') = \mathbf{mari}]$ (nonpast perfect)

⁴ [https://w.wiki/3D\\$7](https://w.wiki/3D$7) (accessed on October 1, 2021).

- b. $\exists e\{\mathbf{TT} < \mathbf{TU}\}[\tau(e) \subseteq \mathbf{TT} \ \& \ \mathbf{see}(e) \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e) = \mathbf{ken} \ \& \ \mathbf{Undergoer}(e) = \mathbf{mari}]$ (“alternative preterite”)
- (52) $\llbracket\text{-na}_P\rrbracket(\text{OP}_{\exists}(\llbracket\text{-i}\rrbracket(\llbracket\text{i}\rrbracket(\llbracket\text{Ken wa Mari ni atte}\rrbracket))))$
- a. $\neg\exists e\{\mathbf{TU} \leq \mathbf{TT}\}[\tau(e) \supseteq \mathbf{TT} \ \& \ \exists e'[e = \mathbf{RS}(e') \ \& \ \mathbf{see}(e') \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e') = \mathbf{ken} \ \& \ \mathbf{Undergoer}(e') = \mathbf{mari}]$ (nonpast perfect)
- b. $\neg\exists e\{\mathbf{TT} < \mathbf{TU}\}[\tau(e) \subseteq \mathbf{TT} \ \& \ \mathbf{see}(e) \ \& \ \mathbf{Actor}(e) = \mathbf{ken} \ \& \ \mathbf{Undergoer}(e) = \mathbf{mari}]$ (“alternative preterite”)

On the (a) interpretation, (50a,b) are “about” a temporal scene where the resultant state of an event whereby Ken sees Mari, described by the pre-tensed clause, held or did not hold. On the (b) interpretation—i.e. the alternative-preterite interpretation—(50a,b) are “about” the temporal scene where an event whereby Ken sees Mari occurred or did not occur. I take (46B_b), as well as the second sentence in (48), to receive the alternative-preterite interpretation.⁵

There is additional language-internal evidence that IRU may indicate pastness: it serves to indicate temporal anteriority in some types of conditional clauses in which a tensed clause cannot occur. Japanese has several markers of conditional clauses, including (*r*)*eba*, *tara*, and *naraba*. (*R*)*eba* and *tara* respectively follow a verbal base and a verb in its infinitive form (Oshima 2014), and thus neither can be combined with a tensed clause; *naraba*, on the other hand, follows a tensed clause.

- (53) a. Pan ga mada {i. areba / ii. *aru(r)eba / iii.
bread Nom still exist.*eba* exist.Npst.(*r*)*eba*
aru naraba}, sore o taberu.
exist.Npst *naraba* that Acc eat.Prs
'If there is some bread left, (I) will eat it.'
- b. Moshi ashita Ken ga {i. kitara / ii.
hypothetically tomorrow K. Nom come.*tara*
*kurutara / iii. kuru naraba}, Mari wa yorokobu
come.Npst.*tara* come.Npst *naraba* M. Th rejoice.Prs
daroo.
ModAux
'If Ken comes tomorrow, Mari will be delighted.'

⁵ A past-tensed nonperfective clause, such as (i), does not allow a preterite-like interpretation, unlike its nonpast-tensed counterpart. I take this to be simply because the quasi-past interpretation of *i* is blocked because it would lead to sheer semantic redundancy, *i* and *-ta* both specifying “**TT** < **TU**”.

- (i) Ken wa Mari ni atte ita.
K. Th M. Dat see.Ger NpfvAux.Npst
'Ken had seen Mari.'

In conditional constructions with (*r*)*eba* and *tara*, if the antecedent describes a possibly true situation in the past (relative to the utterance time), the predicate must involve IRU.⁶

- (54) “I wonder if the rat will eat the rat poison . . .”
- a. Moshi {tabetara/tabereba}, sugu shinu
hypothetically eat.*tara*/eat.*reba* immediately die.Npst
daroo.
ModAux
‘If it eats it, it will die immediately.’
- b. #Moshi tabete {itara/ireba},
hypothetically eat.Ger NpfvAux.*tara*/NpfvAux.*reba*
sugu shinu daroo.
immediately die.Npst ModAux
‘If it ate it, it will die immediately.’
- (55) “I wonder if the rat ate the rat poison . . .”
- a. #Moshi {tabetara/tabereba}, moo shinde
hypothetically eat.*tara*/eat.*reba* already die.Ger
iru daroo.
NpfvAux.Npst ModAux
‘If it eats it, it must be already dead.’
- b. Moshi tabete {itara/ireba}, moo
hypothetically eat.Ger NpfvAux.*tara*/NpfvAux.*reba* already
shinde iru daroo.
die.Ger Npfv.Npst ModAux
‘If it ate it, it must be already dead.’

(55b) is more naturally paraphrased with (56a) with a preterite *naraba*-conditional clause than with (56b) with a nonpast-nonperfective one.

- (56) “I wonder if the rat ate the rat poison . . .”
- a. Moshi tabeta naraba, moo shinde iru
hypothetically eat.Pst *naraba* already die.Ger NpfvAux.Npst
daroo.
ModAux

⁶ This pattern does not straightforwardly carry over to counterfactual conditionals with a “fake past” in the matrix clause.

- (i) “That smart rat did not eat the rat poison . . .”
- Moshi {i. tabetara / ii. tabete itara }, moo shinde
hypothetically eat.*tara* eat.Ger NpfvAux.*tara* already die.Ger
ita daroo.
NpfvAux.Pst ModAux
‘If it had eaten it, it would have been already dead.’

- ‘If it ate it, it must be already dead.’
- b. ??Moshi tabete iru naraba, moo shinde
 hypothetically eat.Ger NpfvAux.NPst *naraba* already die.Ger
 iru daroo.
 NpfvAux.Npst ModAux
 ‘(lit.) If it has eaten it, it must be already dead.’

It is thus natural to suppose that IRU in the antecedent of (55b) indicates pastness in the way the past marker *ta* does in environments where it can occur, such as the antecedent of (56a).

It is worth noting that a rather similar phenomenon is seen in English: the HAVE *-ed* construction, which typically expresses the perfect aspect, can be deployed to express mere temporal anteriority in environments where finite past forms cannot occur, as in (57b):

- (57) a. They have fixed the printer (#yesterday).
 b. They may have fixed the printer yesterday. (≈ It is possible that they fixed the printer yesterday.)

I suggest that, the *-ta* preterite being the default/unmarked means of describing a situation in the past, the quasi-past meaning of *i* is mobilized only for special purposes. One is to compensate for the inability of a negative preterite to describe the non-occurrence of eventualities. Another, typically seen in formal writings, is to signal a marked discourse relation (rhetorical relation), such as exemplification or supplementation, between the clause and the surrounding discourse segments, as in (48). Yet another is to form a (*r*)*eba* or *tara*-conditional clause describing a past situation.

4.3 Negative Preterites with a Stative Base

When the base of a predicate is stative (a stative verb, an adjective, or a nominal predicate), the addition of *-te* IRU is blocked, or has no or only a subtle semantic effect.

- (58) a. Sono hon wa toshoshitsu ni {a. aru / b. *atte
 that book Th library Dat exist.Npst exist.Ger
 iru }.
 NpfvAux.Npst
 ‘That book is in the library.’
- b. Sono jisho wa toshoshitsu ni {a. nakatta / b.
 that dictionary Th library Dat absent.Pst
 *nakute ita }.
 absent.Ger NpfvAux.Pst
 ‘That dictionary was not in the library.’

- c. Resutoran wa ima yasumi {a. da / b. *de
 restaurant Th now closed Cop.Npst Cop.Inf
 iru }.
 NpfvAux.Npst
 ‘The restaurant is closed now.’
- d. Ken no shuchoo wa jijitsu to {a. kotonaru / b. kotonatte
 K. Gen claim Th fact with differ.Npst differ.Ger
 iru }.
 NpfvAux.Npst
 ‘What Ken claims differs from the actual facts.’

A negative preterite form with a stative base does not implicate the plausibility of the logical contradiction of the propositional content in the past; the naturalness of (59B)/(60B) illustrates this point.

- (59) (B, a demolition contractor, comes back after checking out an abandoned mansion.)
 A: Otakara toka atta?
 treasure etc. exist.Pst
 ‘Was there treasure or something?’
 B: **Nakatta** yo. Sonna mono aru wake nai
 absent.Pst DPrt such thing exist.Npst reason not.exist.Npst
 daro.
 DAux
 ‘No, there wasn’t. You know there’s no way there is such a thing.’
- (60) A: Resutoran, yasumi datta?
 restaurant closed Cop.Pst
 ‘Was the restaurant closed?’
 B: E? Iya, **yasumi ja arimasen deshita.**
 Intj no closed Cop.Inf Aux.Plt.Neg(.Npst) PltAux.Pst
 Dooshite desu ka?
 why Cop.Plt.Npst DPrt
 ‘Huh? No, it was not closed. Why?’

It is not clear to me if this implies that a negative preterite with a stative base allows the NOE interpretation. It seems plausible that for a negative predicate with a stative base, the ONE reading is not marked, or even is preferred to the NOE reading, and thus is not pragmatically constrained in the same way as that of a negative predicate with a dynamic base is. This supposition is motivated by the observation that “anti-states” can often be lexically coded, unlike “anti-(dynamic-)events”. In the case of English, for an adjective expressing stative concept S, it tends to be possible to derive, with prefixes like *non-* and *in-*, another adjective expressing “anti-S” (e.g., *non-American*, *inappropriate*). The same does not go with verbs, which generally express a dynamic event.

Consequently, the lack of the plausibility implication in an utterance like (60B) does not necessarily undermine the generalization that *-ta* cannot be outscoped by (propositional) negation to its left.

5 Conclusion

It was argued that in Japanese, as long as situations in the past are concerned, “non-occurrence of eventualities (NOE)” and “occurrence of a negative eventuality (ONE)” are coded differently. NOE is invariably coded with a nonpast-nonperfective form, and ONE is typically coded with a preterite (past-perfective) form. It was also proposed that a nonpast-nonperfective form may indicate that the topic time is in the past, thereby inducing an “alternative-preterite” interpretation.

While various pieces of evidence have been put forth in the literature for the existence of negative eventualities as linguistically expressible objects, explicit markers or constructions favoring one of the NOE and ONE interpretations and deterring the other have hardly been discussed. The analysis presented in this work suggests that examination of Japanese data, and search for phenomena comparable to the Japanese regular-preterite/alternative-preterite opposition in other languages, have good potential to deepen our understanding of “negative eventualities”.

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