

Exploring form/meaning interaction through analysis of a neologism: The case of newly created Japanese verb “*faburu*”

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In linguistics, neologisms have been studied from various points of view, such as morphological, sociolinguistic or cognitive linguistic (e.g. Tsujimura & Davis, 2008) perspectives. In traditional linguistic analysis, there was a difficulty in getting a comprehensive list of new words. To overcome this problem, we use large-scale diachronic Web data and a language processing technique to collect neologisms (Authors, 2006). In this paper, we analyze a newly created Japanese verb, “*faburu*”, which means “to spray Febreze”—Febreze being a brand of odor eliminator—using data from a Web corpus. We focus on this verb’s participation in the *spray-load* alternation (a subtype of locative alternation), and observe how form and meaning are paired.

We use the Web data from 2006. The verb “*faburu*” did not exist before 1999, because that was the year when the product Febreze was first introduced in Japan. The “frequency/text” is 0.0001 at the beginning of 2006. The literal translation of “spray Febreze” is “*faburiizu o suru* [Febreze ACC do]” or “*fabuirizu suru* [Febreze do]”. The verb “*faburu*” is coined based on these expressions.

First, from a syntactic perspective we checked which case marks the target of spray (i.e. curtains, clothes). With “*faburiizu o suru*” and “*fabuirizu suru*”, the target of spray is marked with a dative marker “*ni*”, 100% and 77% respectively. And with “*faburu*”, 40% is marked with “*ni*” and 60% with an accusative marker “*o*” (a direct object marker). The difference of case marking, shown in (1) – (3), is statistically significant ($p < 0.01$).

- (1) *Kaaten* {**o / ni*} *faburiize o suru.*
curtains {**ACC / DAT*} Febreze ACC do
“I did (=sprayed) Febreze to my curtains.”
- (2) *Kaaten* {*?o / ni*} *faburiize suru.*
- (3) *Kaaten* {*o / ni*} *faburu.*

This observation shows that among the three expressions only “*faburu*” participates in spray-load alternation, e.g. (4):

- (4) a. *I sprayed the wall with paint.* b. *I sprayed paint onto the wall.*

Next, we analyzed the semantic structure. It is pointed out that there is a semantic difference between two variants in load-spray alternation such as (4a) and (4b): the direct object in each variant is affected more than the other participant by the event expressed with the verb (e.g. Kageyama, 1980). Especially, in cognitive linguistic analysis this difference is explained with the notion metonymy (Nishimura, 2008) or reference point (Langacker, 1993). These former studies predict that different from earlier forms, *faburu* can express a higher involvement of the target of the spray (which can be marked with an accusative marker) into the event. And the data shows that this prediction is adequate. As in the following (5), in some examples “I want to *faburu* X” is used to say “I hate X”. That is the meaning of *faburu* is changing from a specific one “spray Febreze to eliminate the odor” to a more general one “eliminate some disgusting things”.

- (5) *Aitu no kimosa o sit-tara faburi-taku naru yo.*
he GEN be-disgusting ACC know-if *faburu*-want become Final Particle
“You might want to *faburu* him if you know how disgusting he is.”

In brief, our analysis shows that the emergence of *faburu*’s new meaning is triggered by the argument structure, which is restricted by its syntactic structure. We are now trying to explore broader diachronic Web data for neologisms to construct a methodology which can test various hypotheses in form/meaning interaction.

References

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