Formal/Semantics

*Koto* and negative scope expansion in Old Japanese

The syntax and semantics of negation has been extensively discussed for Modern Japanese (e.g. McGloin (1976), Kuno (1980, 1983), Takubo (1985), Hasegawa (1991)) and to a much lesser extent for Early Middle Japanese (Kato (2002, 2003)). In this talk I show that one function of *koto* in Old Japanese (8th century) is to widen the scope of the negative operator to allow it to take scope over an entire proposition. In order to understand how this works I will first look at some semantic and syntactic properties of *koto* in Old Japanese. On the semantic side, *koto* is assumed to have two meanings in Old Japanese: one related to “verbal actions” (言語行為) and another related to “matter, affair” (事柄). I will show that it also has a more abstract usage, viz. as a nominalizer, possibly of the category C (cf. Watanabe (1996) for Modern Japanese, and pace Fukui & Sakai (2003) also for Modern Japanese). This usage is illustrated in (1). On the syntactic side, *koto* may construct complement clauses in Old Japanese. From Early Middle Japanese (9th – 12th century) and onwards *koto*-complements constitute an important member of the complement system, but in Old Japanese its role is still very limited. By and large, the so-called Nominal form (illustrated in (2)) carries out the functions in Old Japanese that *koto*-complements acquire in Early Middle Japanese. Thus Nominal complements and *koto*-complements form a diachronic correspondence. In Old Japanese, the distribution of *koto*-complements and Nominal complement overlap to some extent, and it is not possible to detect any differences between them in these contexts. This is illustrated in (2)-(3). Most importantly for the purposes of this talk, *koto*-complements and Nominal complements both denote propositions presupposed to be true. There is, however, one context where there is a difference between *koto*-complements and Nominal complements, namely as “complements” of the negative existential predicate *na-* ‘not exist’. I will argue that *koto*-complements and Nominal complements in this context are not complement clauses. Instead they construct two different types of negation. I will argue that *koto*-complements construct wide, sentence (or propositional) negation (as in (4)) while Nominal complements construct narrow, constituent (or term) negation (as in (5)). Both negation types contrast with the standard synthetic negative which denotes a third type of negation that operates on an event (cf. Ernst 2002). Finally, I will show that *koto* is also used in two non-negation contexts to widen scope.
Examples:

(1) **apu koto katasi**
    
    meet.ADN NOMINALIZER is-difficult.CONCL

    ‘it is difficult to meet’
    
    (M 14.3401)

(2) **[sogapi ni ne-siku] ima -si kuyasi mo**
    
    back-to-back COP.INF sleep-PST.NOM now-PRT is-regrettable.CONCL PRT

    ‘how regrettable it is now that we slept back to back!’
    
    M 14.3577 (Province unknown)

(3) **[…nari-ni-si] koto mo kuyasi**
    
    become-PERF-PST.ADN COMP PRT is-regrettable.CONCL

    ‘it is terrible that…’
    
    S 26.9

(4) **[ko-no kapa-no tayuru] koto naku**
    
    DEM-GEN river-GEN stop.ADN COMP not-exist.INF

    ‘this river never stops’
    
    M 18.4098

(5) **[wa-ga sekwo-ni wa-ga kwopuraku]-pa yamu toki mo nasi**
    
    I-GEN girl-DAT I-GEN love-NOM-TOP stop.ADN time PRT not-exist

    ‘my love-longing for my dear girl never stops’
    
    M 11.2612

References:


