

Constructional Variation: Innovative Intransitive Constructions in Japanese
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There are two constructions in Japanese that are sensitive to the transitivity of the verb which is a critical component of the constructions. They consist of the gerundive form of a verb followed by either the stative verb of *iru* or *aru*. The former is exemplified by *Doa-ga ai-te iru* “The door is open”, where the subject corresponds to the theme/patient of the event of opening, and the verb is intransitive; whereas the latter is instantiated by *Doa-ga ake-te aru* “The door has been opened”, where the subject also corresponds to the theme/patient of the event, and the verb is transitive. Both constructions contain a sole argument as a required member, and they have both been identified as intransitive constructions. The meaning of these intransitive constructions is virtually identical in that each describes the state of the theme/patient NP as a result of the event denoted by the verb. The pairing of an intransitive verb with *iru* and that of a transitive verb with *aru* has been considered absolute, leaving no room for variation. In this paper I demonstrate that data from Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) provide ample ground to question the exclusive nature of the normative pairing between the transitivity of a verb and the choice of accompanying *iru* or *aru*. The CMC data further suggest that the emergence of variation in pairing patterns observed with these intransitive constructions may indicate that a linguistic change in grammatical construction has occurred or at least is in progress.

An on-line search reveals that the normative pairings of [intransitive verb + *iru*] and [transitive verb + *aru*] are not as unique and solid as has been previously understood. Innovative patterns of [intransitive verb + *aru*] (e.g., *Hai-ga shizunde aru* “Ashes are sunk”) and [transitive verb + *iru*] (e.g., *Takezutsu-ga shizumete iru* “A bamboo tube has been sunk”) are extensively found. In these examples the normative pairing of an intransitive verb with *iru* and that of a transitive verb with *aru* are crisscrossed. The context clearly shows that each of these sentences corresponds to the normative form of *Hai-ga shizumete aru* and *Takezutsu-ga shizunde iru*. The degree to which these innovative patterns of intransitive constructions are attested is supported by the fact that of 339 morphologically related transitive-intransitive verb pairs listed in Jacobsen (1992), such as *akeru-aku* “open” and *shizumeru-shizumu* “sink”, I found 52% appearing at least in one of the innovative patterns, and 17% (of 339 pairs) in both innovative patterns in CMC. The most likely generalization is that the two normative constructions with Verb-*iru* and Verb-*aru* are emerging into two innovative constructions where the rigid restriction on the transitivity of the verb is no longer imposed. This generalization is further confirmed by a questionnaire-based survey in which native speakers, at least among a younger generation, accept the innovative patterns found in the CMC data as generally natural. Thus, the innovative patterns are full-fledged variants of the intransitive constructions rather than errors as previously considered.