

Japanese grammar notes

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This note is a more well-organized version of [this note](#). It's a reading note of [Akiyama and Akiyama \(2012\)](#), [Tsutsui and Makino \(1989\)](#), as well as lots of books and articles listed in the reference. The methodology followed is in [this note about how descriptive grammars work](#), i.e. “largely generatively informed but surface-oriented and flat-tree in the appearance”.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The Japanese language and its history

1.2 Previous studies

Japanese is a relatively well-documented language, with a native grammar study tradition.

1.3 Language and culture

Chapter 2

Overview of Japanese grammar

2.1 Introduction

Japanese has a strict modifier-first constituent order, and here the term *modifier* includes arguments in a clause (“modifiers of the verb or the verbal adjective”), and even NPs with respect to case particles.

Theoretical aspect 2.1: the notion of head and modifier

This notion of head and modifier is CGEL-like, and is probably related to a strong head-final tendency in the linearization: if a so-called modifier is introduced as a specifier in a functional projection with a root as the core, then obviously the root and the functional heads are realized into one unit (for example a verb complex) and the “modifier” precedes the unit to ensure the (functional) head-final rule, and therefore in the surface-oriented analysis, we also get a modifier-head constituent order (where *head* means lexical heads). If there is no core root, then trivially the “modifier” is realized in a position before the spellout of functional heads, and the latter is regarded as somehow a head in the CGEL sense, and again we get a modifier-head constituent order, if we understand things like case particles as heads, which is the CGEL approach but not the BLT approach.

2.2 Phonology and the writing system

2.3 Parts of speech

2.3.1 Lexical words: nouns and verbs, and everything else

Japanese has a clear noun-verb distinction. This can be found by looking at the morphology: nouns are subject to case marking, which is basically adding a particle to the NP which can be dropped especially in casual speech, while verbs always appear as one of the stem forms plus agglutinative endings.

There are two adjective classes: the verbal adjectives (or *i*-adjectives) and the nominal adjectives (or *na*-adjectives), with different syntactic distribution (verbal adjectives may fill the predicate slot on their own; nominal adjectives never do so) and morphological appearances (verbal adjectives are more like verbs).

One rare property of modern Japanese is the verb class and the verbal adjective class are already closed classes: they rarely accept new members (though not entirely impossible). What makes Japanese rarer is despite being closed, the verbal adjective class is large.

2.3.2 Function items

I specifically use the term *function items* instead of *function words* in the title of this section, because the word-or-morpheme-or-phrase problem is especially serious in Japanese morphosyntax (TODO: ref: school grammar, education grammar). Function items in Japanese include particles, auxiliary verbs, TODO

Theoretical aspect 2.2: So-called category of functional items

Though particles are in the grammar and do not really carry category labels like “noun” or “verb” and it actually makes no sense to discuss the categories of them, the traditional practice to list all particles and classify them is practically desirable, as it provides a quick way to navigate across grammatical systems.

Japanese lacks the prototypically pronoun class: so-called pronouns are customized referential nouns like ‘that girl’, and thus the pronoun class is not closed and strictly speaking is not a part of the grammar. The article class is also not attested.

2.4 The structure of this note

Theoretical aspect 2.3: The organization in reference grammars

The structure of this note and the contents of chapters follow the examples set by [Friesen \(2017\)](#), [Jacques \(2021\)](#), [Grimm \(2021\)](#), the famous CGEL ([Huddleston and Pullum, 2002](#)), and of course Dixon’s three volumes of BLT. The nominal chapters (TODO: ref), especially chap. 5, are organized in the same way as [Jacques \(2021\)](#). The notion of verb complex (chap. 7) is also found in [Friesen \(2017\)](#).

Chapter 3

Pronouns

Chapter 4

Numerals

Chapter 5

Case particles

Chapter 6

The structure of noun phrases

Chapter 7

The verb complex

7.1 Introduction

As is said before, Japanese is strongly modifier-first, and hence productive functional morphemes in the verb complex are always suffixes. Japanese is typologically agglutinative: the morphemes have relatively clear boundaries, each morpheme representing a grammatical category. Still, there are two important factors in Japanese that deviate away from the perfect agglutinative prototype. The first is most morpheme in the verb complex – both the lexical head and most functional morphemes following it – have *internal* morphology. The second is there is still some degree of fusion, in which historically analyzable morphemes seem to already form a single fused morpheme (TODO: tense-neg complex).

Previous researches, mainly the system of the School Grammar and the Education Grammar, often use mutually incompatible terminologies to describe the verb complex. TODO: ref

7.2 The template of the suffix chain

- (1) TODO: examples of Japanese verb complex

Chapter 8

Arguments of verbs

Chapter 9

Clausal constituent order and information packaging

9.1 Topic and subject

The difference between the so-called topic marker *wa* and the subject marker *ga* is a long problem in Japanese grammar.

- (1) TODO: example of Japanese clause

Chapter 10

Subordination

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