

Typological Characteristics of Japanese

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Abstract: Japanese, as a member of the Japonic language family, primarily spoken in Japan, is an agglutinative East Asian language. This project explores several dominating typological features of Japanese in word order, alignment, case marking and syntactic typology.

I. Word Order

1.1 Order of Subject, Object and Verb

The order of subject, object and verb in Japanese is SOV. Examples (Nirenburg, Somers & Wilks 2003) below show that verb is always sentence-final. And the subject is denoted by a nominative marker *wa*, followed by the direct object indicated by an accusative marker *wo*. Different case markers will be discussed in next part.

(1) hito-*wa* yasai-*wo* tabe-ru
A man-TOP vegetable-ACC eat-PRS
'A man eats vegetable'

(2) ryusan-*wa* tetsu-*wo* oka-su
Sulphuric acid-TOP metal-ACC invade-PRS
'Sulphuric acid invades metal'

1.2. Postpositions

Japanese is a postpositional language in which the preposition always follows its complement. There are three kinds of Japanese postpositions: *e*, *ni* and *de*. They mainly serve the functions of LOCATIVE (*ni*, *de*), DATIVE/GOAL/ DIRECTION (*ni*, *e*) and INSTRUMENT (*de*). Example (Vinka 2013) are given as below, which show that these prepositions are attached to their complements very closely. In this term, sometimes they are treated as the case-markers as well. The preposition *ni* conveys the meanings of locative 'in/at/on XXX(place)' in (1b), (1c) and (1d) and dative 'to sb./sth' in (4a). *De* contains the meaning of locative as well in (1a) and instrument 'by/with sth.' in (5). The preposition *e* in (4b) and (4c) denotes the direction which is equal to the English preposition 'to/toward'.

(3) LOCATIVE (*ni*, *de*):

a. Watashi-*wa* gakkoo-*de* eigo-o narat-*ta*.

I-TOP school-in/LOC English-ACC learn-PST
 'I learned English in School'
 b. Maiban, boku-ga Tsubohachi-de biiru-o nomu.
 Every night, I-NOM Tsubohachi-at/LOC beer-ACC drink
 'I drink beer at the pub called Tsubohachi every night.'
 c. Watashi-wa Gifu-shi-*ni* sunde-iru.
 I-TOP Gifu City-in/LOC live-PRS
 'I live in Gifu City.'
 d. Boku-wa ano isu-*ni* suwari-tai.
 I-TOP that chair-on/LOC sit want-PRS
 'I want to sit on that chair.'

(4) DATIVE/GOAL/DIRECTION (*ni, e*):

a. Taroo-ga Hanako-*ni* hana-o age-ta.
 Taroo-NOM Hanako-to/DAT flower-ACC give-PST
 'Taroo gave Hanako a flower.'
 b. Boku-ga Kyoto-*e* it-ta.
 I NOM Kyoto-to go-PST
 'I went to/toward Kyoto'

(5) INSTRUMENT (*de*):

a. Boku-wa jitensha-*de* gakkoo-e it-ta.
 I-TOP bicycle-by/INS school-to go-PST
 'I went to school by bicycle.'
 b. Watashi-wa enpitsu-*de* tegami-o kai-ta.
 I-TOP pencil-with/INS letter-ACC write-PST
 'I wrote a letter with a pencil.'
 c. Nihonjin-wa hashi-*de* tabe-ru.
 Japanese people-TOP chopsticks-with/INS eat-PRS
 'Japanese people eat with chopsticks.'

1.3 Order of Adjective and Noun

The order of adjective and noun in NP is Adjective-Noun that the adjective precedes the noun that it is modifying. Example (Michelsen 2010) are given in (6) and (7) reveal that there are two categories of adjectives: *i*-adjective and *na*-adjective. The difference is that the *i*-adjective ends with *i*, while the *na*-adjective takes *na* before the noun it is modifying. So *na* gets dropped when the *na*-adjective is in the predication. For each category, adjectives can directly modify the noun following it.

(6) a. furui mono
 Old thing
 'Old thing'

b. ookii honya
 Big bookstore
 'Big bookstore'

(7) a. Kireina hito
 Pretty person
 'Pretty person'

b. yumeina hito
 Famous person

‘Famous person’

On the other hand, when the adjective is in the predication--example (8) and (9), the order of adjective and noun is Noun-Adjective, without the *be*-verb/linking-verb. The morpheme *desu* following the adjectives indicates the predication. It is added to *i*-adjective without changing the form of *i*-adjective, while to a *na*-adjective should have the *na* get dropped.

(8) a. *Watashi-no kuruma-wa ookii-desu*

My-GEN car-TOP big

‘My car is big’

b. *Ano kuruma-wa hayai-desu*

That car fast

‘That car is fast’

(9) a. *Yumei-na gakko-desu*

Famous school

‘It is a famous school’

b. *Kono gakko-wa yumei-desu*

This school-TOP famous

‘This school is famous’

1.4 Order of Possessor and Possessed Noun

Additionally, according to Universal 2 of Greenberg and the data have been collected, the order of genitive and governing noun is Genitive-Noun, that the possessor always precedes the governing/possessed noun. The genitive in Japanese is denoted by the marker *no* on the possessor noun preceding the possessed noun, for examples (Kishimoto 2013) for (10) and (11) and (Ura 1996) for (12):

(10) *sensei-no me*

teacher-GEN eye

Lit. Teacher’s eye

‘Teacher’s attention’

(11) *gakusei-no megane*

Student-GEN glasses

Lit. Student’s glasses

‘Student’s expectations’

(12) *Mary-no kami-ga naga-i.*

Mary-GEN hair-NOM long-be

‘Mary’s hair is long.’

1.5 Order of Numeral, Demonstrative and Noun

Similar to Chinese and Korean, Japanese numerals cannot quantify nouns by themselves. The counter word, which is various depending on nouns, has to follow the numeral. There are two kinds of order to express the number. One is Numeral-Noun, shown in (13), the genitive case marker *no* is added to the numeral and the counter to express the meaning ‘two of...’. The other is Noun-Numeral, given in (14), which is without the markers. Examples are from Bender&Siegel (2004).

(13) a. *ni-hiki-no neko*

Two-NumC-GEN cat

‘Two cats’

b. *ni-hiki-no neko-wo ka-u*

Two-NumC-GEN cat-TOP raise-PRS

‘(I) raise two cat’

(14) a. *neko ni-hiki*

Cat two-NumC

‘Two cats’

b. *neko-wa ni-hiki ie-de*

Cat-TOP two-NumC house-LOC

‘I raise two cats in (my) house’

Furthermore, according to Greenberg’ Universal 18 and the data set, in Japanese, if the descriptive adjective always precedes the noun, then the numeral and demonstrative should precede the noun as well.

(15) *kono hon*

this/my-DEM book

(16) *sono hon*

that/your-DEM book

II. Alignment and Case-Marking

2.1 Alignment in S1, A2 and P3 Role

Japanese has a nominative-accusative alignment by treating the S argument of an intransitive verb like the A argument of a transitive verb, with P argument distinct (S=A, P separate). Because of the lack of verb-agreement, Japanese applies the case-markers to indicate the roles of the sentence elements. Examples below (Fukuda 2007) manifest that for all kinds of grammatical person and number, the nominative position (subject) of both transitive and intransitive verb is always marked by *ga* (or *wa* under certain circumstances to indicate TOPIC), while the accusative position (object) is distinct by the marker *o*.

(17) *kodomo-ga aruk-ta*

Child-NOM walk-PST

‘Child walked’

(18) *gakusei-ga geragerato waraw-ta*

Students-NOM loudly laugh-PST

‘Students laughed loudly’

(19) *gakusei-ga yama-o nobor-ta*

Student-NOM mountain-ACC climb-PST

‘The student climbed the mountain’

(20) *Boku-ga atsui-yakan-o ukkari sawar-ta*

I-NOM hot-kettle-ACC by.mistake touch-PST

‘I touched the hot kettle accidentally’

(21) *sukaato-ga yuka-o sawar-ta*

Skirt-NOM floor-ACC touch-PST

‘The skirt touched the floor’

(22) *Ken-ga Taro-ni aw/bustukar/dekuwas-ta*

Ken-NOM Taro-DAT meet/run into/come-PST

¹ S: Argument of intransitive verb

² A: Argument of transitive verb behaving like a canonical agent

³ P: Argument of transitive verb behaving like canonical patient

‘Ken met/ran into/came across Taro’

(23) Kare-*wa* shefu desu

He-TOP chef (ARTICLE)

‘He is a chef’

(24) Anatachi-*wa* gakusei desuka?

You-TOP student (ARTICLE)

‘Are you student?’

So for both pronouns and nouns of all grammatical person and number, the forms of alignment in Japanese is listed in Table 1:

Table.1: Case-markers for S, A and P role

Grammatical person&number	S	A	P
1 st sg&pl	<i>ga/wa</i>	<i>ga/wa</i>	<i>o</i>
2 nd sg&pl	<i>ga/wa</i>	<i>ga/wa</i>	<i>o</i>
3 rd sg&pl	<i>ga/wa</i>	<i>ga/wa</i>	<i>o</i>

2.2 Japanese Case-marking

Japanese is an almost purely dependent-marking language without any kinds of head-marking. So the verb-agreement is not involved in Japanese, namely, verbs do not have different forms to indicate grammatical person, number or gender. The same form of a verb is employed no matter what properties its arguments have.

As a dependent-marking language, case-marking system exists. Japanese nouns do not have plurality. They work both as singular and as plural without changing the forms. Examples given below present the different case markers (nominative, topic, accusative, dative, locative, lative, ablative and instrument) are attached to nouns to show their roles or cases in the sentence.

(25) boku-*ga* tomodati-*ni* hana-*o* age-*ta*

I-NOM friend-DAT flower-ACC give-PST

‘I gave flowers to my friend’ (Zwart 2004)

(26) Tanaka-*no* yasashii-tomodachi-*ga* ki-*ta*

Tanaka-GEN nice-friend-NOM come-PST

‘Tanaka’s nice friend came’ (Bender&Siegel 2004)

(27) toukyou-*kara* ki-*ta*

Tokyo-ABL come-PST

‘(Someone) came from Tokyo’

(28) kono kuruma-*wa* arukouru-*de* dare ugokemasu

This-DEM car-TOP alcohol-INS only move

‘This car runs only on alcohol’

(29) watashi-*wa* nohon-*e* ichido it-*ta*

I-TOP Japan-Lative once go-PST

‘I went Japan (only) once’

(30) kono hoteru-*ni/de* hooru-*ga* aru

This-DEM hotel-LOC hall-NOM be-3rdSG.

‘There is a hall in this hotel.’ (Ohtani 2013)

So according to the data, the paradigm of the word *toukyou* ‘Tokyo’ is presented in the following table 2:

Table 2: Case markers for ‘Tokyo’

Case	Forms of ‘Tokyo’
Nominative (NOM)	toukyou- <i>ga</i>
Topic (TOP)	toukyou- <i>wa</i>
Accusative (ACC)	toukyou- <i>(w)o</i>
Dative (DAT)	toukyou- <i>ni</i>
Locative (LOC)	toukyou- <i>ni/de</i>
Lative	toukyou- <i>e</i>
Ablative (ABL)	toukyou- <i>kara</i>
Instrument (INS)	toukyou- <i>de</i>

III. Syntactic Typology

3.1 Passives

Japanese passives have the valency-changing operation. The original subject could be omitted in a prototypical passive sentence. But for most cases, Japanese passives switch the position of the original subject and object and then change the accusative marker *(w)o* of the original subject to the dative marker *ni*. Then the original subject becomes the dative agent NPs as the adjuncts. The examples (Toyota 2011) of basic passives in Japanese are shown below:

- (31) a. George-*ga* guitar-*wo* hik-u
 George-NOM guitar-ACC play-PRS
 ‘George plays the guitar’
- b. Guitar-*ga* (George-*ni*) hik-are-ru
 Guitar-NOM George-DAT play-PASS-PRS
 ‘The guitar is played (by George)’
- (32) a. Keisatsu-*ga* Ken-*wo* tsukamae-ta
 Police-NOM Ken-ACC catch-PST
 ‘The police caught Ken’
- b. Ken-*ga* (Keisatsu-*ni*) tsukmae-rare-ta
 Ken-NOM police-DAT catch-PASS-PST
 ‘Ken was caught (by the police)’

Seen from the examples above, Japanese passives employ the verb affixes as the morphological devices. The verb is marked morphologically. The suffix indicating the passive is attached to the verb. If a verb ends in a consonant, then adding the suffix *are* or *aremasu* (polite form), such as the verb *hik* ‘play’ in example (31a), applying the suffix *are* to get the passive form /hik-are/ ‘be played’. Otherwise, if a verb ends in a vowel, such as the verb *tsukamae* ‘catch’ in example (32b), attaching the suffix *rare* or *raremasu* (polite form) to obtain the passive form *tsukamae-rare* ‘be caught’.

There is no special particles employed to indicate passives. But the case markers *ga* and *ni* are involved to understand the construction of passives. The nominative position is always marked by *ga*. When the passives are built on transitive clauses, on the one hand, the original direct object (O) is promoted to the sentence-initial nominative position as a subject (A) marked by *ga*. On the other hand, the original subject is switched to the place in which follows its new subject and shown by the dative case marker *ni* which means ‘by XXX.’ in passives. Comparing the examples (31) and (32), the noun at the nominative position is always marked by *ga*. In (31a) and (32a), ‘guitar’ and ‘Ken’ are at the accusative position marked by *wo*. In the passives shown by (31b) and (32b), ‘guitar’ and ‘Ken’ are promoted to the nominative position, while the original objects ‘George’ and ‘police’ are switched to the position following the nominatives and marked by the dative case marker *ni* to indicate the meaning ‘by George’ and ‘by police’.

Beyond the basic passives, Japanese has a special kind of passives called indirect passives which do not have the corresponding active forms and are allowed to be built on intransitive clauses and stative verbs. And the devices of morphological marker on verbs is employed as well to indicate indirect passives. Indirect passives sometimes are called pseudo-passives because which are not the real passives. Indirect passives are used when the action, which was done on the subject by someone, is out of the subject's control, namely, to express an event which is unfortunate or someone has been suffered from something. Several examples (Kubo 1992) of indirect passives are given below:

(33) Paul-*wa* John-*ni* shin-are-ta

Paul-NOM John-DAT die-PASS-PST

Lit. 'Paul was died by John'

'Paul was adversely affected by John's death'

(34) Ken-*wa* ame-*ni* hu-rare-ta

Ken-NOM rain-DAT descend-PASS-PST

'Ken was rained on'

(35) Ken-*wa* Naomi-*ni* sinkoosyuukyoo-*o* hajime-rare-ta

Ken-NOM Naomi-DAT new religion-ACC begin-PASS-PST

Lit. 'Ken was joined a new cult by Naomi'

'Ken experienced Naomi's joining a new cult'

Shown by the examples above, indirect passives also apply verb affixes and indicate the agent phrase with the dative marker *ni*. In example (33) and (34), intransitive clauses can be built as passives. Then, example (35) presents that the passives can be built on stative verbs as well. However, as for any type of verbs, phonological rules of applying the morphological markers---affixes *are* and *rare* on verbs are the same as what the direct passives follow.

There are two differences between the indirect passives and the basic passives. Firstly, indirect passives do not have the corresponding active ones. Because indirect passives are supposed to express the passive feelings. Secondly, the nominative position in indirect passives is marked by the topic marker *wa*.

So the consequences of the interpretation of the case markers in the indirect passives could be confusing that an actor is interpreted as Accusative and a sufferer as Nominative in the same sentence. However, under this circumstance, the sufferer takes the semantic role as an experiencer which is also supposed to be in a nominative position. And because of the East Asian culture background, the expressions in Japanese are supposed to be indirect and obscure.

3.2 Causatives

Japanese causatives are lexical and morphological. The periphrastic causatives are not applicable. And same as the passives, Japanese causatives apply the valency-changing strategy by introducing the new argument---the causer.

As for the lexical causatives, there are two subtypes. One is the zero-derived lexical causatives, in which the verbs do not change their forms but do contain the causative meaning, which is shown in (36). Another type of the lexical causatives is that some verbs in Japanese already consist of the morpheme *sase*, namely, the causative morpheme *sase* is a part of the verbs, but not regarded as an affix. The example (37) shows that the stem of the verb 'rot' is *kusarase*.

(36) Taro-*ga* hune-*o* sizume- \emptyset -ta

Taro-NOM boat-ACC sink-CAUS-PST

Lit. 'Taro sank the boat'

'Taro makes the boat sink' (Harley 1995)

(37) Taroo-ga yasai-o kusar-(s)ase-ta
 Taro-NOM vegetable-ACC rot-CAUS-PST
 ‘Taro caused the vegetable to rot’ (Harley 1995)

However, the most common way to obtain the causatives is morphological by attaching the affix *sase* to verbs, for example (Harley 1995):

(38) Taroo-ga Hanako-ni hon-o yon-(s)ase-ta
 Taro-NOM Hanako-DAT book-ACC read-CAUS-PST
 Lit. ‘Taro made the book read by Hanako’
 ‘Taro made Hanako read the book’

(39) Taroo-ga Ziroo-ni Kazuo-o home-sase-ta
 Taro-NOM Ziro-DAT Kazuo-ACC praise-CAUS-PST
 Lit. ‘Taro made Kazuo praised by Ziro’
 ‘Taro made Ziro praise Kazuo’

Furthermore, the data show that the lexical causatives are able to be constructed on ditransitive verbs, while the morphological causatives can be built on both intransitive and transitive verbs. Because in Japanese, the ditransitive verbs are in the form of lexical causatives. Example (40a) and (40b) present the lexical causatives with the Japanese ditransitive verbs *kiseru* ‘put on’ and *watasi* ‘pass’, while in example (41) and (42), the morphological causatives are indicated by the causative morpheme *(s)ase* in the transitive and intransitive verbs.

(40) Ditransitive Lexical Causatives:

a. Hanako-ga Taroo-ni yoohuku-o kiseru
 Hanako-NOM Taro-DAT clothes-ACC put-on
 ‘Hanako puts the clothes on Taroo’

b. John-ga hanataba-o Mary-ni watasi-ta
 John-NOM bouquet-ACC Mary-DAT pass-PST
 ‘John passed a bouquet to Mary’

(41) Intransitive Lexical Causatives (Harley 1995):

a. Calvin-ga Hobbes-o ik-ase-ta
 Calvin-NOM Hobbes-ACC go-CAUS-PST
 ‘Calvin made Hobbes go’

(42) Transitive Lexical Causatives (Harley 1995):

a. Calvin-ga Hobbes-ni pizza-o tabe-sase-ta
 Calvin-NOM Hobbes-DAT pizza-ACC eat-CAUS-PST
 ‘Calvin made Hobbes eat pizza’

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