A NEW CLASSIFICATION FOR THE JAPANESE VERB.

BY - TAKAHASHI, GEORGE

JAPANESE VERBS AND THE PARTICLES WHICH OFTEN ACCOMPANY THEM PRESENT DIFFICULTIES TO LEARNERS OF THAT LANGUAGE. THE TRADITIONAL GRAMMATICAL TERMS, "TRANSITIVE" AND "INTRANSITIVE" (VERBS), REFLECT CONCEPTS WHICH ARE VALID IN ENGLISH BUT NOT IN JAPANESE. THE AUTHOR, IN ATTEMPTING TO CLASSIFY ALL JAPANESE VERBS ACCORDING TO THEIR NATURE AND BEHAVIOR, FIRST LISTS EIGHT CATEGORIES OF ACTION AND NONACTION VERBS AND NOTES WHICH CATEGORIES TAKE CERTAIN PARTICLES. IN STUDYING THESE CATEGORIES, HE FINDS THAT THE ACTOR'S WILL AND HIS ABILITY TO CONTROL THE ACTION OF THE VERB ARE LOGICAL CONCEPTS REFLECTED IN THE EIGHT CATEGORIES. HE CONCLUDES THAT ALL JAPANESE VERBS CAN BE ASSIGNED TO "CONTROLLABLE" OR "NONCONTROLLABLE" CATEGORIES AND THAT MEMBERSHIP IN ONE OF THESE CATEGORIES DETERMINES WHICH PARTICLE CAN OCCUR WITH THE VERB. THIS ARTICLE WAS PUBLISHED IN THE "JOURNAL-NEWSLETTER OF THE ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS OF JAPANESE." (JD)
A NEW CLASSIFICATION FOR THE JAPANESE VERB

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(Editor's Note: This article consists of portions of Parts I and II of a considerably longer paper entitled 'Toward a New Operational Theory for the Classification of Japanese Verbs and a Functional Study of Certain Case Particles' which Mr. Takahashi submitted to the Journal-Newsletter. Since considerations of space made it difficult to print the article as originally submitted, Mr. Takahashi has kindly consented to allow the Editor to prepare the abridged version of the first part of his paper which appears below. The full version of the original article is scheduled for later publication in Japan.)

Without doubt the most difficult problem that confronts the learner of the Japanese language is the correct usage of its particles. This difficulty further extends itself into the teaching of the language. Even the native speaker who presumably has mastered the language depends largely on his native intuition and frequently has great difficulty in explaining how to determine its usage. To say, "It sounds odd," or to say, "At least I wouldn't say it that way," is no aid to the student who is groping for an answer. Perhaps this is not the fault of the teacher. We may blame it on the unavailability of a plausible explanation of the role and function of particles and their relationship with Japanese verbs. While the Modern Japanese verb has been under study for almost a hundred years, both by Japanese grammarians and by non-Japanese, there seems to be a lack of a plausible explanation of the Japanese verb that would explain its peculiar behavior in relation to particles. The problems which confront both scholars and students may be stated as follows:

1. The first problem to be noted is the perpetual question of whether a particular verb is 'transitive' or 'intransitive'. Many Japanese grammarians would reject the usage of these terms stating that they cannot be meaningfully applied to Japanese verbs. On the other hand, many, for the lack of a better alternative, continue to use them and, consequently, find themselves penalized by having to explain the many exceptions and peculiarities which occur as a result. The whole problem arises from the need to explain or to determine the kind of verbs that may be preceded by the case particle o. The cause of the problem and the resulting confusion seems to stem largely from the Japanese grammarians' attempt to apply Occidental terminology to their verbs without first delving deeper into an analysis of the nature of the Japanese verb itself and is further compounded by attempts of foreign scholars to apply their own concepts and terminology of verbs to Japanese. This problem would not be so acute if the English concepts of 'transitive' and 'intransitive' corresponded to the equivalent Japanese concepts of tadôshi and 116shi. For example, the English verbs 'to meet' and 'to understand' are not the same as the Japanese conceptual equivalents au and waouteru. In English, 'to meet' and 'to understand' are transitive because grammatically they take a direct object. However, in Japanese, these verbs are not transitive in concept and therefore not transitive and thus are not preceded by the particle o.
This is most confusing to English students who are attempting to learn Japanese. Explanations of *ni* such as, "the verb *au* 'to meet'," or, "The English verb 'meet' being a transitive verb, you 'meet a person'. But in Japanese, the verb *au* is intransitive and must be preceded by the particle *ni*," and explanations of *o* such as, "The particle *o* written in some spelling systems, but pronounced *o* shows that the preceding word is the object of the verb. The meaning of *o* is opposite that of *ga*, which is the particle indicating the subject of the verb, of copula, or of the adjective..." are really not very adequate for the student. Even if the classification of certain verbs corresponded in both English and Japanese, the question still remains as to why one type of verb takes the particle *o* and others do not. A case in point is such verbs as *iku*, *suumu*, *deru*, and *otoru*. These verbs are termed *jidoshi* which is the equivalent for the term 'intransitive' in English and are so considered in English also. Yet, these can all be preceded by *o* as follows: *mihi o iku; ame no naka o susumu; gakko o deru; basu o otiru*. It is usual to explain away these phenomena by saying that there are two classes of verbs that take the particle *o*, one transitive and the other intransitive. The transitive takes the particle *o* to indicate the direct object, and the intransitive to indicate the place of passage and the point of departure. This may seem plausible. However, when we encounter such verbs as *iku*, *isogu*, *kotaru*, *hataraku*, etc., we would still be at a loss for all of these verbs are intransitive (*jidoshi*) in Japanese and yet again take the particle *o*: (Machigatta, kotae o shitsumon ni kotarimashita. (Achira kochira de) dorobo o hatarakimashita. Seishun o (DIAL 111) iku. Shokui o isogu. Japanese grammarians seem to have found a unique way of explaining this phenomena using a peculiar logic. Scholars of the National Language Research Institute (Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyūjo) explain that *o* is also used to "indicate the object of the intransitive verb which has temporarily taken the transitive nature." Indeed, it seems that the less a scholar addresses himself to this problem, the safer he is. Descriptions of these occurrences are not lacking. However, no plausible explanation seems to have been found to explain what is in essence the function of the particle *o* and its relationship with the nature of the verbs that follow.

This situation suggests: a. either, that the nature of the Japanese verb is such that it defies all attempts to come to grips with it and, thus, we must, as a matter of course, be resigned to be content with what is available; b. or, that we are desperately in need of a new classification of verbs which will offer an alternative to the existing meaningless classification.

2. The problems involved in the teaching of the Japanese language do not seem to be limited to the above. Even if one supposes that there is no such real problem in the learning of Japanese as that indicated above, there is another area of Japanese that defies rational explanation. This is an analysis of the function and role that the case particles such as *ga*, *wa*, *ni*, *de*, *e*, etc., play in the syntactical make-up of the Japanese language. The usual definition of these particles which one finds in Japanese language texts is as follows: "In Japanese there is
an important group of words called particles. They resemble English prepositions such as in, on, of, at, from, etc., in that they indicate the relation of one word, phrase or clause to another or connect the different parts of a sentence. An investigation of several other English as well as Japanese sources does not reveal much more of an explanation. The many and varied usages of particles are not difficult to find. However, because there is no rational explanation of the basic function of these particles in relation to the verbs which follow and the role they play in the construction of Japanese sentences, teaching has been difficult and learning more haphazardous.

Listed below are some usages of the particle ni to indicate some of the questions that students of Japanese may raise.

a. Koko ni arimasu (It's 'located' here).
   Question: why not use de which also indicates location?

b. Watashi wa 'bed' ni nemasu (I sleep on a bed).
   Question: why not use de which also indicates instrument or location or e which some native-speakers use?

c. Yamada-san ni aimasu (I meet Mr. Yamada).
   Question: why not use o? Is 'meet' not transitive?

d. Seito ni oshiemasu (I teach the student).
   Question: why not use o?

e. Sansai ni nai tamashita (I learned it from the teacher).
   Question: what is the function of ni here; why not use kara when we mean 'from'?

f. Kodomo ni oshieraremashita (I learn from my child).
   Question: why not use kara when we mean 'from'?

g. Hana ga niwa ni sake (The flower blooms in the garden).
   Question: why not use de to indicate the place?

h. Hako wa shita ni okimashita (I put the box down).
   Question: why not e as some native-speakers say?

i. Boshi o kugi ni kakenashita (I hung the hat on the nail).
   Question: why not e as some native-speakers say?

If the instructor cannot give a clear answer to such questions, it must be an almost impossible task for a non-Japanese to master the correct usage of even one particle such as ni. One way to escape this problem is to suggest that there are many o's and ni's which are homonymic. While this seems plausible, there is no reliable guide which will determine the many and different meanings of these particles for they are dependent solely on the subjective views of the observer or analyzer. The resultant existing chaotic situation can be seen if we examine the
common explanations of the function of the particle ni: "The particle ni expresses direction primarily. This particle may be translated in various ways in English, but the most common use of ni is similar to 'to' in English."7 "Particle ni: The particle ni indicates a GENERAL SORT OF LOCATION in space or time, which can be made specific by putting a place or time word in front of it . . . . The particle ni is also used figuratively . . . . And it sometimes shows PURPOSE . . . . It is also used to indicate a CHANGE OF STATE . . . . and, after a copula noun to show MANNER . . . . Occasionally a particle like ni will be used in an expression which calls for an unexpected equivalent in the English translation: Dare ni nippon o naraimashita ka? (Who did you learn Japanese FROM. Who did you learn Japanese FROM?) 8

The questions that need to be answered here are: In what most common situation does the particle ni occur to express 'direction primarily' with the most common use of ni similar to the English 'to'? What GENERAL SORT OF LOCATION are we talking about? Are these two authors talking about the same particle ni? What does one mean when he states that 'a particle like ni' is used? Is there one particle ni and another particle which is like ni?

One grammarian attempts to explain ni as follows: "Ni a particle (postposition) which is used to connect two concepts. The first concept, whatever its form, is always thought of as a substantive. The second concept may be in the form of a noun, a verb, or even an entire sentence. The function of ni in any particular sentence depends on the nature of the concepts connected, and therefore, cannot be determined until both concepts are known. Its use has, however, definite limits. For example, it cannot mark the first concept as being either direct subject or the direct object of a verb. It can, however, mark it as being an indirect subject or object. It has a sort of static feeling, and though it may mark the purpose, and, or manner of an action, whenever it does mark connection with a dynamic concept, such connection will be at least comparatively indirect."9

The questions that need to be answered in an explanation such as this would be: When the author explains, "The function of ni in any particular sentence depends on the nature of concepts connected, and therefore, cannot be determined until both concepts are known," does it mean that this problem is peculiar to ni? When he uses the English terms of direct object, direct subject, etc., does he suggest that the English grammatical concept is applicable to Japanese? If so, does not ni in Yamadesan ni aimehita point to the direct object? What is the function of ni in Nipponjin ni wa wakarimasen yo? And further, when he states, "It has a sort of static feeling . . . .", does it suggest that one may comprehend the function of a particle bysomeone's emotional, spiritual, or physical experience?

The problem of the particle as described above also suggests the following observations: a. either the Japanese case particles such as o and ni, like its verbs, elude all analysis and examination and consequently, we must proceed as we have been with an almost grab bag system
of explanation and a piece meal approach to the teaching and learning of
the language; b. or, there is, in addition to the need for a rational
classification of verbs, a real need for a rational analysis of the
function of these particles in terms of the roles they play in conjunc-
tion with verbs.

Concluding that there is a vast area in the study of the Japanese
language which presents a serious problem in learning and teaching it,
and further observing that no adequate study has yet been made to ration-
ally examine the nature of Japanese verbs, the function of case particles,
and the relationship these two have in the syntactical construction of
Japanese sentences, it is the objective of this study to bring to bear
certain universal language concepts for the study of Japanese verbs and
certain particles and to present an unifying conceptual framework to-
gether with an operational theory which will shed greater light upon the
area most noticeably lacking in clarity.

I. Scope, Assumption and Approach

A. The scope of this study is limited to the objectives as noted above.
It is not the object of this study to deal with the inflexional behavior
of Japanese verbs nor to deal with all the Japanese particles. Both of
these are available in Japanese and English sources.

B. The two basic assumptions which led to the findings as presented in
this study were: 1. that all verbs--words which describe the state of
action and non-action--can be classified according to their nature and
their behavior; 2. that, since there is a great deal of regularity in the
occurrences of a certain particle with a certain type of verb, it should
not be difficult to discover the functional and dependent relationship
between them.

C. Approaches: 1. Pursuing the assumptions listed in B above, the
following tentative list of states of action and non-action as expressed
in verbs was established: a. Actions that are stationary or static such
as aru, iru, sumu, owaru, etc. b. Actions that are independent and sta-
tionary such as taberu, omou, yomu, miru, wakaru, dekiri, etc. c. Actions
that are autonomous such as useru, saku, futoru, yaseru, etc. d. Actions
that are 'other' object or person directed and dependent such as
oshieru, ageoru, au, noru, and the causative verbs, etc. e. Actions that
are 'self or subject' directed and dependent such as morau, ukeru, narau,
and passive verbs in general. f. Actions that describe sustained motion
such as isogu, oyogu, robu, mawaru, etc. g. Actions that describe hori-
Zontal motion such as iku, kuru, hairu, deru, etc. h. Actions that
describe vertical motion such as aseru, sagaru, oriru, ochiru, etc.
2. The second step was to list some 400 basic verbs that appear in
Naganuma's Tokuhon Vol. 1 under each of these 8 categories. Although a
few verbs were somewhat dubious as to placement, all were given some
position.
3. The third step was to examine each of these verbs which were so
classified by attaching the particles ge, (wa), de, or, ni, and e.
4. When most of the verbs were thus attached with the possible particles as noted, three facts became evident. They were: a. Among the verbs that were listed in categories a through e in 1 above, verbs appeared that took the four particles of ga, de, o, and ni, and also verbs that took only the particles ga, de, and ni. b. All of the verbs listed under 5, 6, and 7 which dealt with motion and movements could take all the particles ga, de, o, ni, and e. c. Closer examination of these verbs revealed that all verbs, regardless of their class, could take ga, de and ni, whereas o seemed to be more confined and limited to motion and direction verbs.

5. The fifth step was to set aside for the moment those verbs classified as motion and direction verbs and to separate the verbs which took only the particles ga, de and ni from those that took ga, de, o, and ni.

6. The next step was to search for the presence of some common characteristic or the lack of it in the verbs thus separated. As a conceptual tool for analysis and examination, the following question was posed: When the case particle ga (wa) is used, can the subject be animate, or inanimate, or both? When this question was posed, over 90% of the verbs could have both animate and inanimate subjects, and only a few such as aru, saku, furu, etc., could not be enacted by an animate subject or actor. Here, the first group that did not take the particle o was isolated.

7. At the seventh stage, another question was posed: Can human volition play its part? The result of this question was to further separate such verbs as iru, futoru, yaseru, etc., into the group which would not take the particle o. It was tentatively concluded that verbs that could not be enacted with human volition could not take the particle o. This was considered an important clue in conducting a further examination of the verbs which took the particle o.

8. The next step was to put the focus on the verbs that could not take the particle o. Among these were aru, noru, wakeru, etc. Here, another question was posed: Can human will play its part in the execution of these verbs? The result was better. While one could answer affirmatively with regards to all of the verbs that took the particle o, the answer was more uncertain for those verbs which could not take o.

9. It was at this point that an universal characteristic for both classes of verbs—those that took the particle o and those that did not—was established: a. All verbs in which human volition and will could play a part took the particle o. This included the motion and direction verbs. b. All verbs that did not take the particle o either occurred without human volition and will, or were dependent on the presence of some antecedent factor.

D. Discovering the logical alternative: Concluding that the operation of the human will was the factor that determined the presence of the particle o, the first tentative operational conceptual tool in question form was formulated to analyze all verbs. This was to ask: Can I will for the negative state to occur when all the factors are present and conditions are optimum for the positive state to occur? This immediately again isolated the verbs which were non-volitional in nature such as aru, iru, and those verbs that dealt with acts of nature such as saku, furu.
futoru, etc. However, this question was too vague to analyze the others. Another question was formed: Can I will for the negative state of the verb to occur when it is already in the present progressive? The result was better. This isolated such verbs as au, wakaru, noru, etc., together with the verbs of nature. The underlying logic is that one cannot will for non-meeting when he is already meeting at present. One cannot will that he not understand when he is already understanding, nor can one will for non-riding when he is already riding. It now became clear why the English terms 'transitive' and 'intransitive' which are related only to the grammatical form of the language structure were unsuited for Japanese. The reason certain Japanese verbs will not take the particle が is due to the fact that the human will cannot completely control the act or the situation. Conversely, any verb which can be controlled by the human will seems to occur with the particle が, however infrequently the actual occurrence may be.

E. Conclusion: The logical alternative to the present classification of Japanese verbs is separation into 'controllable verbs' and 'non-controllable verbs'. The terms used by the English speaker, 'transitive' or 'intransitive', and the Japanese grammarians 'jidōshi' and 'tadoshi' are both inadequate, if not meaningless, in attempting to classify Japanese verbs.

II. Formulation of a Conceptual Question and a Theory for the Classification of the Japanese Verbs

A. Based on the findings as noted in Part One, it is the objective of this part to present a broad theoretical framework, and a rational theoretical tool which, by its operation, will classify Japanese verbs into two major classes and several meaningful categories.

B. The terminology: The English terminology of 'transitive' and 'intransitive' and the presumed Japanese equivalents of tadoshi and jidōshi need to be abandoned. An attempt to preserve the English terms or an attempt to redefine them to suit the new findings would compound the problem. An attempt to redefine the Japanese terms, tadoshi and jidōshi would require a complete redefining of the whole concept. Thus, the terms 'controllable verbs' and 'non-controllable verbs' are used to represent the two major logical classes of verbs that will result from this study. A 'controllable verb' refers to any verb which expresses an act that one can completely control by exercising his volition and will or which has this potential. A 'non-controllable verb' refers to a verb which expresses any act, state of being, state of things, time, etc., which cannot be controlled by mere exercise of the actor's will. The terms used to describe the sub-classes or categories of the two major divisions were established following the general outline of the classification used in the initial analysis presented above. Certain categories were added to aid the later analysis of the function of particles, while others were combined. Verbs indicating the state of being, state of things, and time were added while verbs of sustained motion, horizontal and vertical movements were combined into one category. The reasons for
choosing these terms were twofold: First, to clear the field of any previous mis-conceived notions about the nature of Japanese verbs and, second, to avoid linguistic jargon as much as possible in order to be able to communicate with those who have not been initiated into the esoterism of the linguistic society.

C. Formulation of the theoretical framework and concepts: As a result of analyzing the verbs that took the particle が and those that did not, and further examining the nature of verbs that required the particle に, certain universal characteristics of a particular group of verbs began to emerge. After some analysis and reformation of the concept of verbs, the following theoretical three part question was formulated as a universal conceptual tool for the analysis and classification of Japanese verbs.

1. Theoretical three-part question: a. Assuming that I am fully equipped with all of the necessary faculties and material factors, can I engage in the verb under examination? B. And, if the answer is affirmative, can I will for the suspension of the act, or will for its negative state to occur without further action, when it is already in the present progressive? c. And, if the answer is also affirmative, can I will to fulfill the act alone?

2. Classification and Analysis: If the answer is negative or uncertain for the question, the verb under examination is a non-controllable verb. The categories of verbs which result in such a case are: a. Natural Process Verbs such as the blossoming of the flowers, the falling of rain or snow, the blowing of the wind, shining of the sun, rusting of metal, rotting of fruit, etc. b. State of Being Verbs which express emotional reaction such as being happy or being sad; or verbs that express human potential such as being able to do some act like speaking, understanding or learning, etc.; or verbs which express a physical state of being such as being tired, being fat, or being skinny, etc. c. State of things, affairs and time: Verbs which express an impersonal activity such as the erection of a building, construction of a bridge, increasing or decreasing of something, or the start of or the coming to conclusion of certain affairs or action.

If the answer is affirmative for the first question, but is negative for the second question, the verb under examination is also 'non-controllable'. The verbs that result from the negative answer here are those which a man can engage in but cannot be negated by will alone, and are dependent on some antecedent factor to fulfill the meaning of the verb. Verbs like meeting, riding, sitting down, etc., require an antecedent factor such as another party to meet, a vehicle to ride, or something to sit on such as a chair. If the answers are affirmative for all three questions, the verb under examination is controllable.

The categories of verbs that result from this part of the question are: a. Independent verbs that one can engage in alone, such as to eat, to read, to write, to think, to put something down, etc. b. Autonomous
motion or direction verbs. This refers to verbs that express sustained movements such as to walk, to swim, to run, to fly, etc., and to those that express direction, such as going, coming, climbing, descending, or departing. These verbs would necessarily cover both distance and space.

If the answer is affirmative for the first two questions, but negative for the third question, the verb under examination is controllable. However, since these verbs cannot be engaged in alone, they are termed 'controllable dependent verbs'. There would be two types of verbs under this heading. Such actions as 'teaching', 'giving', and 'asking' require a 'learner', 'receiver', or 'answerer'. Such verbs as 'to receive', 'to learn', 'to be caught', etc., require a 'giver', 'teacher' or 'catcher'.

All of these verbs are also dependent on some other party to fulfill their meaning.

D. Theory in Operation: When the original 400 and some odd verbs were re-examined with the above theory, the chart which resulted was almost identical with the initial classification, except for the new categories under 'non-controllable' verbs. The classification that resulted from the application of the conceptual tool is here shown with several samples.
General verbs

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verbs in general

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II. Causative, passive, potential, and desiderative: From the foregoing analysis, causative and passive constructions can be classed into controllable verbs for the very meaning of the verbs indicate action by will and volition. While one may find expression techniques such as: *kase ni o tenarete* instead of *kase ga o taoshita*, this is not unusual if we consider that man has attributed acts of nature as being caused by some supernatural entity. It seems that it is not the actor that determines the occurrence of *o*, but the act itself. It must be noted here also that for every non-controllable verb there is a controllable equivalent in Japanese. All those that do not have an equivalent can be changed into controllable verbs by transformation into the causative form. Potential verbs and desideratives are for the present purpose classed into the non-controllable state of being verbs. The occurrence of *o* with these will be discussed in the final part of this study.

F. Concluding Remark on the Classification of Japanese Verbs: As the foregoing operational theory and the resultant classification indicate, it is concluded that Japanese verbs can be rationally examined and logically classified by certain universal language concepts. The several implications this finding has on the further analysis of case particles and Japanese syntax will be discussed below. For those who might be interested in examining the verb classifications attempted by Japanese grammarians for contrast and comparison, Mr. Haruhiko Kindachi lists and comments on most of the representative works.11

FOOTNOTES

1. Read Yoshio Yamada's thorough examination and reasoning for his rejection of this classification in his *Nippon Bungo Seisho Geiron* (1951), 225-274.
7. Han, 42.
10. The study of the irregular occurrence of *o* will be discussed elsewhere.