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Part I

Introduction

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1 Typological and historical overview

This book attempts to describe and, in so far as is possible, explain various characteristics of the Japanese language. This introductory chapter provides a brief overview of its typological characteristics and historical development. Chapter 2 deals with regional dialectal variations. Although I strive to use minimal linguistic jargon, some technical terminology is inevitable, as ordinary language does not provide a sufficient vocabulary for describing its internal workings. Critical vocabulary terms are explained when they are introduced and are also listed in the index. Because this chapter and Chapter 2 employ a number of them, readers who are not yet familiar with general linguistics may prefer to read Chapters 1 and 2 after Chapter 7.

1.1 About the Japanese language

Japanese is the native language of virtually all Japanese nationals, approximately 128 million as of 2011,¹ the ninth largest native-speaker population among the world's languages.² Moreover, as of November 2011, approximately 128,000 non-native speakers in Japan were studying Japanese as a foreign language.³ Overseas, approximately 3.65 million persons in 133 countries studied Japanese in 2009.⁴

Typologically, Japanese is classified as an **AGGLUTINATIVE LANGUAGE** because units of meaning are “glued” on one after another as exemplified in (1). (Abbreviations appearing in the annotations are listed before the beginning of this chapter.)

- (1) *tabe- sase- rare- taku- na- katta- ra*
 eat CAUS PASS want.to NEG PAST COND
 ‘if (you) don’t want to be made to eat’

¹ The Statistics Bureau of Japan: www.stat.go.jp/data/nenkan/zuhyou/y0201b00.xls.

² The SIL Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com/statistics/size.

³ The Agency for Cultural Affairs: www.bunka.go.jp/kokugo_nihongo/jittaihou/h23/gai-koku_1.html.

⁴ The Japan Foundation: www.jpf.go.jp/j/japanese/survey/result/dl/survey_2009/2009-01.pdf.

4 Japanese

Tabe- is the invariant part of the verb *taberu* ‘eat’ (Chapter 5); *sase-* is the causative auxiliary (Chapter 11); *rare-* is the passive auxiliary (Chapter 12); *taku-* is the adverbial form of the auxiliary *-tai* ‘want to do ~’ (Section 7.6); *na-* is the invariant part of the negative auxiliary *nai* ‘not’ (Section 6.1); *-katta* can be considered as the past tense marker (Section 6.3); *ra* is a conditional connective particle (Chapter 18).

Many characteristics of the world’s languages are predictable based upon the basic word order of subject, object, and verb in declarative sentences (Greenberg 1963). The vast majority of the world’s languages are either subject-verb-object (SVO) or subject-object-verb (SOV) in orientation. Japanese falls into the latter group, and is characterized as an **SOV LANGUAGE**. As Greenberg’s typology predicts, when an auxiliary element is attached to a main verb, it always follows the main verb as in (1); Japanese uses **POSTPOSITIONS** (e.g. *byōin ni*) instead of **PREPOSITIONS** (e.g. *to the hospital*) as in (2a); the interrogative (question) marker *ka* appears at the end of the sentence as in (2b); and the word order in questions involving an **INTERROGATIVE** word (e.g. *who, what, where, when*) does not differ from declarative-sentence counterparts as shown in (2c) (see Section 14.7 for further discussion).

- (2) a. *Kinō byōin ni ikimashita.*
 yesterday hospital to went
 (I) went to the hospital yesterday.’
- b. *Kinō byōin ni ikimashita ka.*
 yesterday hospital to went INT
 ‘Did (you) go to the hospital yesterday?’
- c. *Kinō doko ni ikimashita ka.*
 yesterday where to went INT
 ‘Where did (you) go yesterday?’

Modifying elements – i.e. demonstratives (e.g. *this, that*; see Subsections 5.2.5 and 5.2.26), adjectives, and relative clauses (see Chapters 14 and 26) – always precede the modified noun, e.g. *kono* ‘this’ + *kuruma* ‘car’, *chiisai* ‘small’ + *kuruma*. When a proper noun and a common noun are combined, the former always precedes the latter (see Subsection 5.2.1), e.g. *Aoyama-dōri* ‘Aoyama Street’, *Sumida-gawa* ‘Sumida River’, *Shimogamo-jinja* ‘Shimogamo Shrine’, *Takao-san* ‘Mount Takao’. In comparison constructions (see Chapter 10), the order of the constituent in English is adjective-marker-standard as in *heavier* [adjective] *than* [marker] *that chair* [standard], whereas that in Japanese is standard-marker-adjective as exemplified in (3):

- (3) *Kono isu wa ano isu [standard] yori [marker] omoi [adjective].*
 this chair TOP that chair than heavy
 ‘This chair is heavier [adjective] than [marker] that chair [standard].’

In linguistics courses, Japanese is a stock language for illustrating pitch accent (see Section 3.5), sound-symbolic vocabulary (e.g. onomatopoeia; see Subsection 5.2.8), case marking (see Chapter 7), the topic–comment construction (Chapter 8), indirect passive constructions (Section 12.2), internally headed relative clauses (Section 14.3), honorifics (Chapters 20–21), and gendered language variation (Chapter 28).

1.2 Historical development

The various developmental stages of the Japanese language are commonly associated with the following historical periods.

Prehistoric	~ AD 600	Jōmon, Yayoi, and Kofun periods
Old Japanese	592–794	Asuka and Nara periods
Late Old Japanese	794–1192	Heian period
Middle Japanese	1192–1603	Kamakura, Muromachi, and Azuchi-Momoyama periods
Early Modern Japanese	1603–1868	Edo period
Modern Japanese	1868 ~	Meiji, Taishō, Shōwa, and Heisei periods ⁵

1.2.1 Prehistoric age

The Japanese archipelago has been inhabited for at least 30,000 years (Ikawa-Smith 1978: 276). The first inhabitants are believed to have migrated from southeast Asia during the Paleolithic period (a.k.a. the Stone Age) (Hanihara 1991: 7). The next period, called Jōmon, began approximately 16,500 years ago, triggered by rapid climate change at the end of the Ice Age (Habu 2004: 3, 245). The Jōmon people, evolved from the Paleolithic population, were gatherers, fishers, and hunters who inhabited the length and breadth of Japan, from Hokkaidō in the north to Okinawa in the south (Hanihara 1991: 7).

Around the third century BC, metal tools and paddy-field rice cultivation were introduced as part of the massive-scale migration from the north Asian mainland primarily via the Korean Peninsula, which marks the beginning of the Yayoi period. Newcomers formed small states, probably in northern Kyūshū, that eventually gave rise to a larger power structure, and by the sixth century AD an Imperial Court was established in the Kinki (Nara-Kyōto) district (Hanihara 1991: 24). Today's Japanese people are, ethnologically, an

⁵ In addition to the Gregorian calendar, Japan uses a year designation system based on the reigns of emperors: Meiji 1 = 1868, Taishō 1 = 1912, Shōwa 1 = 1926, Heisei 1 = 1989.



Map 1.1. The Japanese archipelago.

amalgamation of the populations of both southeast and northeast Asia, and the development of the Japanese language reflects this amalgamation.

Many researchers consider this racial mixing to continue to be in progress in modern times. For example, Hanihara (1991: 18–19) contends that examination of the skeletal morphology of modern Japanese men reveals that north Asian characteristics predominate in north Kyūshū and west Honshū (the largest island of Japan), whereas Jōmon characteristics have been maintained in Hokkaidō, northeast Honshū (i.e. Tōhoku), Shikoku, south Kyūshū, and Amami and Okinawa islands. This distribution indicates that the regions which were little affected by the Imperial Court in the early historic ages have retained their Jōmon heritage. This hypothesis has been supported by studies of modern Japanese people in molecular genetics

(Omoto 1978; Hammer and Horai 1995) and in measurements of bodily dimensions (Kouchi 1983).

The origins of the Japanese language have been disputed. For example, Miller (1971) and N. Osada (1974) argue that Japanese belongs to the **ALTAIC** language family, while Murayama (1974) and Kawamoto (1980) attribute its origins to the **AUSTRONESIAN** family of languages spoken on the islands of southeast Asia and the Pacific. Ono (1981), on the other hand, claims that Japanese belongs to the **DRAVIDIAN** language family, particularly close to Tamil (a language spoken in southern India and northeastern Sri Lanka). This book will not engage in this issue further because linguistic techniques and methods used to determine language origins are limited to the last 5,000–6,000 years, whereas the Japanese language originated much earlier (Matsumoto 2003: 45). As a result, there has been a consistent decline in interest in this topic among historical linguists since the 1970s (T. Osada 2003).

The end of prehistory – i.e. the Kofun period, the third to the sixth centuries AD – saw the unification of small states that ultimately gave rise to the Imperial Court. (*Kofun* means ‘burial mounds’, such mounds being constructed for people of the ruling classes.) Two significant cultural events occurred at this time: the Chinese writing system was introduced in the late fourth and early fifth centuries (Section 4.1), and Buddhism was introduced in 538 (or 552).

1.2.2 Old Japanese (592–794 AD)

The years from 592 to 794 are referred to as the Asuka-Nara period, following the locations of the imperial palace. Until then, Japan was mentioned only sporadically in inscriptions and in Chinese historical documents. However, it was during this period that the recording of the Japanese language, referred to as **OLD JAPANESE**, commenced. The earliest recorded documents are *Kojiki* (‘Records of Ancient Matters’) (712), *Fudoki* (‘Regional Gazetteers’) (713), *Nihonshoki* (‘Chronicles of Japan’) (720), and *Man’yōshū* (‘Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves’) (672–771).

The syllabic structure of Old Japanese is very simple, each syllable consisting of a lone vowel or a consonant followed by a vowel, as shown in Table 1.1.⁶ The voiced consonants /b, d, z, r, g/ do not occur word initially, and syllables consisting solely of a vowel occur only word-initially; that is, a succession of vowels is prohibited within a word, with very few exceptions (Hashimoto 1938; Tsukishima 1988: 189–90). (Slashes surrounding letters indicate that the sound itself, rather than the letter, is being discussed.)

⁶ As a means of pronouncing words loaned from Chinese, Old Japanese likely included such complex syllables as /kya, gya, kwa, gwa/; however, to simplify the exposition, they are not discussed in this chapter.

Table 1.1 *Modern and Old Japanese syllables.*⁷

Modern Japanese					Old Japanese				
a	i	u	e	o	a	i	u	e	o
ka	ki	ku	ke	ko	ka	ki _α ki _β	ku	ke _α ke _β	ko _α ko _β
ga	gi	gu	ge	go	ga	gi _α gi _β	gu	ge _α ge _β	go _α go _β
sa	shi	su	se	so	tsa	tsi	tsu	tse	tso _α tso _β
za	ji	zu/dzu	ze	zo	za	zi ⁸	zu	ze	zo _α zo _β
ta	chi	tsu	te	to	ta	ti	tu	te	to _α to _β
da	ji	zu/dzu	de	do	da	di	du	de	do _α do _β
na	ni	nu	ne	no	na	ni	nu	ne	no _α no _β
ha	hi	fu ⁹	he	ho	pa	pi _α pi _β	pu	pe _α pe _β	po
ba	bi	bu	be	bo	ba	bi _α bi _β	bu	be _α be _β	bo
ma	mi	mu	me	mo	ma	mi _α mi _β	mu	me _α me _β	mo _α mo _β
ya		yu		yo	ya		yu	ye	yo _α yo _β
ra	ri	ru	re	ro	ra	ri	ru	re	ro _α ro _β
wa					wa	wi		we	wo
n									

The most controversial issue regarding Old Japanese is that, unlike the **MODERN JAPANESE** five-vowel system (Section 3.1), there appears to have been more vowels, with puzzling distributions: some vowels were consistently recorded with two distinct sets of Chinese characters, but only in combinations with certain consonants. These vowels are designated as α and β in Table 1.1.¹⁰ (Syllables that differ from Modern Japanese are shaded.)

A possible explanation for this peculiar distribution postulates eight vowels (e.g. Ono 1957), as demonstrated in the /k/ line in Table 1.1. Such being the case, why did the eight vowels occur only with some consonants but not with others? Furthermore, what sound values did the α - β distinctions represent? Hattori (1976: 4) proposes a six-vowel hypothesis in which ki_{α} corresponds to /kyi/, ki_{β} to /ki/, ke_{α} to /kye/, ke_{β} to /ke/, ko_{α} to /ko/, and ko_{β} to the central rounded vowel /ø/, as shown in Figure 1.1. However, as yet there is no consensus among Old Japanese specialists.

⁷ The sound values of some symbols appearing in Table 1.1 in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) are: /u/ [u], /shi/ [ɕi/i], /ji/ [dʒi], /chi/ [tʃi], /hi/ [çi], /fu/ [ɸu], /y/ [j], and /r/ [r]. See Section 3.1 for further explanation.

⁸ “ z ” represents the second consonant in the word *vision*.

⁹ The symbol “ f ” represents the friction sound created when blowing out a candle, i.e. [ɸ] in the IPA. It is different from English /f/, which involves the upper teeth.

¹⁰ The α - β distinction of /mo/ disappeared very early, so it is recorded only in *Kojiki* and not in subsequent documents of this period.

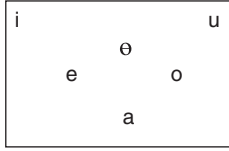


Figure 1.1. Hattori's analysis.

The Old Japanese consonant corresponding to the modern /s/ was likely /ts/ or /ch/ (Arisaka 1957), although only /ts/ is listed in Table 1.1.¹¹ The consonant corresponding to modern /h/ was /p/ (Ueda 1898), which changed during the Nara period to /f/ [ϕ] (Komatsu 1981: 249). The voiced consonants were likely to be preceded by a nasal sound (a phenomenon called **PRENASALIZATION**); that is, /b/ was pronounced as /^mb/, /d/ as /ⁿd/, and /g/ as /^ŋg/ (Hashimoto 1980).

1.2.3 Late Old Japanese (794–1192)

In 794, the capital was relocated from Nara to Kyōto. The period until 1192 is referred to as Heian, and the language then spoken as **LATE OLD JAPANESE**. The α–β distinction of the vowels disappeared early in this period,¹² resulting in the modern five-vowel system. Late Old Japanese also witnessed the following sound changes (Tsukimoto 1988: 79–81):

- (4) a. /e/ and /ye/ > /ye/: enoki 'Japanese hackberry' > yenoki; yeda 'tree branch' (unchanged) (The symbol ">" is read as "merged" or "changed to.")
- b. /o/ and /wo/ > /wo/: oki 'offing' > woki; woka 'hill' (unchanged)
- c. /i/ and /wi/ > /i/: e.g. iru 'to need' (unchanged); wiru 'to exist' > iru
- d. Influenced by the Chinese sound system, the voiced consonants /b, d, z, r, g/ began to appear word initially.
- e. /f/ [ϕ] in word medial position became /w/: /fa, fi, fu, fe, fo/ > /wa, wi, u, we, wo/, e.g. *fafa* (modern *haha*) 'mother' > *fawa*; *kafu* 'to buy' > *kawu* (= *kau*).

Today, the topic particle *wa* (see Chapter 8) is still written as wa, reflecting this sound change. The consonant corresponding to today's /s/, which was /ts/ or /ch/ in Old Japanese, became /s/ or /sh/ by the end of the Late Old Japanese period (Arisaka 1957: 146).

In addition, a group of sound changes took place, referred to in Japanese linguistics as **ONBIN** 'euphony'. It can be explained with examples from the verb **TE-FORM** (Chapter 6). Originally, the conjunctive particle *te* was added

¹¹ This interpretation is still controversial. Murayama (1988: 18–19), for example, argues that both /ts/ and /s/ existed in the fifth century, and that /ts/ gradually merged into /s/ between the fifth and eighth centuries.

¹² The distinction between $ko_{\alpha}-ko_{\beta}$ and $go_{\alpha}-go_{\beta}$ was maintained until circa 900 (Tsukimoto 1988: 78).

10 Japanese

to the verb adverbial form; however, when the adverbial form ended in /ki/ or /gi/, the /ki + te/ and /gi + te/ sequences respectively became /ite/ and /ide/ as in (5a).

(5) a. *aruki* ‘walk’ + *te* > *aruite*; *oyogi* ‘swim’ + *te* > *oyoide*

When the final syllable of the adverbial form was /bi/ (= /^mbi/), /ni/, or /mi/, the sequence with *te* became /nde/ as in (5b). By this process, the **MORAIC NASAL** (Section 3.3) was born. (The moraic nasal existed in Old Japanese only in words borrowed from Chinese.)

b. *tobi* ‘fly’ + *te* > *tonde*; *sini* ‘die’ + *te* > *sinde*; *yomi* ‘read’ + *te* > *yonde*

When the final syllable of the adverbial form was /ti/, /fi/, or /ri/, the sequence with *te* became /tte/ as in (5c).

c. *mati* ‘wait’ + *te* > *matte*; *ifi* ‘say’ + *te* > *itte*; *ari* ‘exist’ + *te* > *atte*

Also included in *onbin* is the change of some occurrences of /ku, gu, fi, bi, mi/ to /u/. This change created a long vowel, e.g. *nikuku* ‘feeling disgusted’ > *nikuu* (= *nikū*).

d. *kanasiku* ‘being sad’ > *kanasiu*; *waragutu* ‘straw boots’ > *waraudu*; *otofito* ‘younger brother’ > *otouto*; *yobi* ‘call’ + *te* > *youde*; *kamigamisi* ‘divine’ > *kaugausi*

Another noteworthy event in Late Old Japanese is the invention of **KANA SYLLABARIES**, which enabled Japanese people to record their language with their own script, rather than in the cumbersome manner necessary for using the Chinese writing system (Chapter 4). This invention facilitated the creation of great literature, e.g. *Kokin wakashū* (‘Collected Japanese Poems of Ancient and Modern Times’) (905), *Tosa nikki* (‘Tosa Diary’) (circa 935), *Ise monogatari* (‘The Tales of Ise’) (the late tenth century), *Makura no sōshi* (‘The Pillow Book’) (c. 1000), *Genji monogatari* (‘The Tale of Genji’) (c. 1000). The compilation of dictionaries also commenced in this period, e.g. *Tenrei banshō meigi* (a dictionary of Chinese characters) (c. 830), *Ruiju myōgishō* (a classified dictionary of Chinese characters) (the late eleventh century).

1.2.4 Middle Japanese (1192–1603)

In 1192, MINAMOTO no Yoritomo became the first *shōgun* ‘a commander of a force’ and established his government in Kamakura in Kanagawa prefecture, shifting political power from the Imperial Court to the warrior class and bringing about feudalism. In 1338, ASHIKAGA Takauji gained power and moved the capital to Muromachi in Kyōto prefecture. The Muromachi period ended in 1573 when the fifteenth shōgun was expelled by the warlord ODA Nobunaga. From 1573 to 1603 is known as the Azuchi-Momoyama period (a.k.a. the Sengoku ‘Warring States’ period) because Nobunaga built his castle in Azuchi in Shiga prefecture, and his successor TOYOTOMI Hideyoshi built his in Momoyama in Kyōto prefecture.