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SEMANTIC AND GRAMMATICAL PROPERTIES OF THE VERB CATEGORY IN JAPANESE

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Annotatsiya: Maqolada yapon tilidagi fe’l kategoriyasining semantik va grammatik xususiyatlari zamonaviy yapon tilshunosligi nuqtayi nazaridan tahlil qilinadi. Fe’lning predikativ tabiati, argument tuzilishi, o‘timlilik-o‘timsizlik, zamon, aspekt, nisbat, mayl, inkor va hurmat shakllari o‘zaro bog‘liq tizim sifatida ko‘rib chiqiladi. Ayniqsa, -te iru konstruksiyasining davomiy, natijaviy va holat ma’nolari, passiv va kauzativ shakllarning sintaktik-semantik ta’siri hamda fe’l valentligi masalalari misollar asosida yoritiladi.
Kalit so‘zlar: yapon tili, fe’l, semantika, grammatika, zamon, aspekt, nisbat, valentlik, o‘timlilik

Аннотация: В статье рассматриваются семантические и грамматические свойства категории глагола в японском языке. Анализируются предикативность, аргументная структура, переходность и непереходность, время, аспект, залог, модальность, отрицание и формы вежливости. Особое внимание уделяется конструкции -te iru, пассивным и каузативным формам, а также взаимодействию валентности глагола с падежным маркированием.
Ключевые слова: японский язык, глагол, семантика, грамматика, время, аспект, залог, валентность, переходность

Abstract: This article examines the semantic and grammatical properties of the Japanese verb category within a modern linguistic framework. It treats predication, argument structure, transitivity, tense, aspect, voice, modality, negation and honorific morphology as interrelated components of the verbal system. Particular attention is given to the polyfunctionality of -te iru, the semantic consequences of passive and causative constructions, and the interaction between verbal valency and case marking. The analysis shows that Japanese verbal meaning is distributed across lexical semantics, inflectional morphology and constructional context rather than being located in a single grammatical category.
Keywords: Japanese language, verb, semantics, grammar, tense, aspect, voice, valency, transitivity

The verb is one of the central organizing categories of Japanese grammar because it functions as a primary predicate and determines the argument structure of the clause. In Japanese, verbal meaning cannot be described adequately through dictionary meaning alone. The lexical content of a verb interacts with case particles, auxiliary elements, aspectual constructions, voice morphology, modality and discourse conditions. For this reason, Japanese verb analysis requires a combined semantic and grammatical approach [1; 3]. The National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics likewise treats verbs as predicators that provide the “skeleton” of the sentence and studies their behavior across such categories as aspect, voice and tense [8; 9].

Japanese verbs form an open lexical class whose members typically denote actions, processes, changes of state, activities, relations and certain stative situations. Canonical examples include kaku “write”, hashiru “run”, aku “open (intransitive)”, akeru “open (transitive)”, shiru “know”, aru “exist (inanimate)” and iru “exist (animate)”. Unlike nouns, verbs inflect and can independently head a predicate without a copular element in their ordinary finite forms. Their lexical semantics

specifies the type of event or state being profiled, while grammar locates that event relative to time, aspectual viewpoint, participants and speaker stance [2; 4].

Modern Japanese verbs are conventionally divided into consonant-stem (godan), vowel-stem (ichidan) and irregular verbs. Godan verbs such as kaku "write" display stem alternations before suffixes (kaka-nai, kaki-masu, kaku, kake-ba, kake), whereas ichidan verbs such as taberu "eat" preserve a stable stem (tabe-nai, tabe-masu, taberu, tabe-reba). The two major irregular verbs are suru "do" and kuru "come". This morphological classification is not merely pedagogical: it governs the realization of negation, politeness, conditionality, voice and other verbal categories [1; 5].

Japanese verbal tense is commonly described through a basic opposition between past and non-past. The non-past form covers present-time states, habitual activities, generic statements and future events, while the -ta form typically places an event before the speech time or establishes perfective/anterior interpretation in context. Thus, Tarō wa mainichi benkyō suru can mean "Taro studies every day", while Ashita Tōkyō e iku means "I/he will go to Tokyo tomorrow". The same non-past morphology therefore receives its temporal interpretation from lexical aspect and adverbial context. This is one reason why a direct one-to-one mapping from Japanese forms to English tense labels is misleading [2; 6].

Aspect is especially important in Japanese because the construction V-te iru is sensitive to the lexical semantics of the verb. With activity verbs it commonly expresses an ongoing event: Tarō wa ima hon o yonde iru "Taro is reading a book now". With change-of-state verbs, however, it often denotes the resultant state: Mado ga aite iru "The window is open" (literally, "has opened and is in that state"). With certain verbs it can also describe repeated or habitual situations. The interpretation is therefore a product of constructional meaning and Aktionsart. Japanese aspectual analysis has long emphasized the distinction between event-in-progress, continuing state and resultative readings [6; 9].

Japanese contains a large number of morphologically related transitive–intransitive verb pairs. Examples include aku / akeru "open (intr.) / open (tr.)", hajimaru / hajimeru "begin (intr.) / begin (tr.)", ochiru / otosu "fall / drop" and kowareru / kowasu "break (intr.) / break (tr.)". These pairs differ not only syntactically but semantically: the transitive member profiles an external causer or agent, whereas the intransitive member profiles the change undergone by the theme. Case marking reflects this difference: Doa ga aita "The door opened" versus Tarō ga doa o aketa "Taro opened the door". The NINJAL basic verb resources explicitly classify such verb pairs according to conjugational and morphological patterns [10].

Valency refers to the number and semantic types of arguments licensed by a predicate. A one-place predicate such as neru "sleep" typically selects an experiencer/agent marked by ga; a two-place predicate such as yomu "read" selects a subject and an object marked by o; a three-place verb such as okuru "send" may select sender, theme and goal, as in Tarō ga Hanako ni tegami o okutta. Japanese case particles therefore work together with verbal lexical meaning to establish grammatical relations and semantic roles. Valency is not fixed in a purely mechanical sense, because voice and constructional alternations can alter the syntactic realization of participants [3; 7].

Japanese voice morphology includes productive passive -(r)are- and causative -(s)ase-. In the direct passive, the patient is promoted to subject position: Tarō ga Hanako o shikatta "Taro scolded Hanako" becomes Hanako ga Tarō ni shikarareta "Hanako was scolded by Taro". Japanese also has an indirect or adversative passive, where the subject is interpreted as affected by an event even when it is not the direct patient. The causative introduces or foregrounds a causer: Sensei ga gakusei ni sakubun o kakaseta "The teacher made/let the student write an essay". These forms demonstrate how verbal morphology changes both argument structure and event construal [1; 3].

Negation is primarily expressed through the verbal negative ending -nai, historically and synchronically interacting with adjectival morphology in distinctive ways. Modality is expressed through a wide range of verbal and auxiliary constructions such as -darō "probably/will", -kamoshirenai "may", -beki da "should", -nakereba naranai "must" and imperative or prohibitive patterns. Politeness adds another grammatical layer: the -masu paradigm marks addressee-oriented politeness, while honorific and humble verb choices such as irassharu, nasaru, ukagau and itasu encode social relations between participants. These forms show that Japanese verbal grammar is also a system of interpersonal meaning [4; 5].

A key property of Japanese verbs is that lexical semantic class constrains grammatical interpretation. The contrast between an activity verb, a change-of-state verb and a stative verb affects the interpretation of tense and aspect. Similarly, motion verbs combine with directional expressions in different ways from psychological predicates, and caused-motion verbs impose different case frames from simple intransitives. This interaction explains why grammatical categories cannot be analyzed independently of lexical semantics. Contemporary Japanese lexical research therefore gives special attention to valency alternations, property versus event predication, V+V compounds and lexicon–syntax interactions [8].

The following examples illustrate the close relation between lexical meaning and grammatical form. In Kodomo ga isu ni suwatte iru "The child is sitting on the chair", -te iru describes a maintained posture. In Denki ga tsuite iru "The light is on", the same construction describes a result state. In Ame ni furareta "I was rained on", passive morphology has an adversative interpretation rather than a simple English-style patient passive. In Tarō wa eigo ga dekiru "Taro can speak/do English", the potential meaning is associated with a ga-marked phrase rather than an ordinary accusative object. Such patterns are central to the typological profile of Japanese.

Table 1. Core verbal categories and their semantic contribution

Category	Typical form	Primary contribution	Example
Tense	-ru / -ta	non-past vs. past/anterior	iku / itta
Aspect	-te iru	progressive, resultative, habitual	yonde iru
Passive	-(r)areru	patient/affected perspective	shikarareru
Causative	-(s)aseru	caused or permitted event	kakaseta
Negation	-nai	negative polarity	ikanai
Politeness	-masu	addressee-oriented politeness	ikimasu

The Japanese verb category is a multidimensional system in which lexical semantics and grammar are inseparable. Verbs determine the basic argument structure of clauses, but their interpretation is continuously reshaped by tense, aspect, voice, polarity, modality, politeness and discourse context. The Japanese past/non-past opposition does not correspond exactly to European tense systems; -te iru is strongly conditioned by lexical aspect; passive and causative morphology reorganize participant structure; and transitive–intransitive verb pairs encode different construals of the same event domain. A semantically informed grammatical analysis is therefore essential for both linguistic description and Japanese language teaching. The most productive model is one that moves from the lexical meaning of the verb to its valency, case frame and constructional realization rather than treating morphology as an isolated list of forms.

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