

文法を越えて

—『自発』概念を中心に—

—Grammar as Culture—

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1. Languages and Cognition

At first, I began this project by examining the difference in cognitive processes concerning space and time among between languages, paying looking at specific attention to a language called Kuuk Thaayorre in Pormpuraaw, Cape York, Australia. The speakers of this language always use absolute cardinal directions rather than relative directions such as ‘right’ and ‘left.’ So they say, for example, a plate of salad is in to the west of a plate of toasts instead of using to the left or right. They excel at sensing these cardinal directions at any time and in any situations. Any given ability in their brain could become keener than others thanks to the ‘plasticity’ of the brain, any given ability in their brain to think in such a way would develop over time, making them more skilled than others at thinking in terms of cardinal directions. Additionally, when they arrange cards that represent temporal progressions, such as a man aging, as a movement from east to west so that time proceeds, they arrange cards from east to west. Specifically, when asked to use cards to demonstrate this, they placed a newborn baby in the east and an elderly person in the west, regardless of what direction they currently faced, in contrast to English speakers’ manner of arranging them from left to right. *1

When we learn a second language, we tend to think based on the modes or frames of our own mother tongue. We often notice in the instruction of Japanese that students try to translate from English and do not use patterns that exist only in Japanese: for example, ーしてくれた vs. ーした. If they used these unfamiliar patterns more often, their Japanese would be closer to that of a native speaker. We might call this ‘Non-Use of Learners.’ Tatsuru Uchida, a famous Japanese scholar of contemporary French philosophy, once astutely pointed out that it is quite simple to master a foreign language: all you need to do is memorize and use set phrases in the target language without translating them through your native language patterns. Of course, he did not forget to add that this is not an easy task.

2. Intransitive Verbs in Japanese

When analyzing non-European languages, scholars both in Japan and the West generally use ideas and terms that were originally created to analyze English and other European languages. Needless to say, concepts such as transitive and intransitive verbs are among them. I believe that using the same definition of verbal transitivity is not so applicable to Japanese grammar. Intransitive verbs in Japanese cannot be truly understood by English speakers based on the idea of transitivity in English, i.e. the distinction between a verb either taking or not taking an object. The majority of

verbs in English are so-called ‘ambitransitive’ verbs. That is, verbs that have the same form for transitive and intransitive uses, such as ‘to *open* (the door)’ and ‘(the door) *opens*.’ But let us think about the verb, *Todokeru/Todoku* in Japanese. According to a Japanese language textbook, the English translations of these verbs are, respectively, ‘to *deliver* (something)’ and ‘(something) to *be delivered*.’ However, textbooks don’t tell us the difference between *Todoku* and *Todokerareru* (the passive form of *Todokeru*) even though the English translations are the same. As is evident to Japanese speakers, the use of *Todokerareru* is limited to certain situations, such as when emphasizing ‘the agent’ (a letter was delivered by UPS) or ‘a method or a way’ (it was delivered in express mail). On the other hand, ‘*Todoku*’ is used often and means, ‘(a letter) is delivered naturally or spontaneously (by nobody’s will).’ The meaning of *Todoku* is close to ‘*Kuru*’ (to come). The use of such intransitive verbs in Japanese emphasizes certain spontaneity of action. Let us consider another typical example. We say 魚が釣れた when we have succeeded in catching something while fishing. The verb is intransitive. By contrast, English speakers would use a transitive verb, saying ‘I caught a fish.’ Is it okay to translate 釣れた as ‘a fish was caught’? No. By omitting the subject, the translation communicates a very different sentiment in English than it does in Japanese. The only option is to translate using a transitive verb: as ‘I caught a fish.’ I think that this is the most symbolic part of Japanese intransitive verbs. The phrase 魚が釣れた conveys that an action has just occurred despite the lack of volition involved. Of course, English speakers use expressions such as ‘Any luck?’ or ‘Good luck!’ when fishing; in these situations, the implication is that luck cannot be controlled by human will. Like Japanese people, then, they accept a limit of human volition to a particular degree. We should be careful about being too stereotypical.

Here, we can organize types of intransitive/transitive verb pairs in Japanese depending on corresponding verbs in English. As you can see in Table 1, the first type is the above-mentioned ‘ambitransitive verbs.’ Verbs in the second group are translated into ‘to do’ and ‘to be done’ respectively. In the third group, vi and vt correspond to different verbs or expressions. Verbs in the last group have different forms for vi and vt but they both derive from the same origin, like Japanese verbs. There are only three verbs that belong to this last group, which is one reason why English speakers are confused to see numerous pairs of vt/vi.

Table 1 Transitive and Intransitive Verbs in English and Japanese

Type	自動詞	他動詞	Vi	Vt	note
1	開く	開ける	X opens	To open X	Ambitransitive verbs have the same form
2	届く	届ける	X is delivered	To deliver X	
3	付く	付ける	X (TV) goes on	To turn on X (the light)	Vi and Vt correspond to different verbs.
4	倒れる	倒す	X falls	To fell X	Only 3 verbs: rise/raise, lie/lay. Like Japanese, they derive from the same origin.

We tend to use intransitive expressions in Japanese, rather than transitive ones. In English, by contrast, transitive expressions are used more often. We can understand the strong preference for transitivity in English verb phrases more clearly when we consider the following examples. (1) *She sang [v.i.] the baby to sleep.* Although ‘sing’ is here an intransitive verb, it functions as if it were transitive, allowing the subject (‘she’) to act directly on the object (‘the baby’). *2 You can see the same function in other examples, such as: (2) I was so hungry that I nearly ate myself to death, (3) She danced her boyfriend weary. Also, using intransitive expressions may be regarded as avoiding responsibility in an example such as ‘the milk was spilt’ instead of ‘I spilt the milk.’ A recent experiment in cognitive psychology shows that Japanese and Spanish speakers, compared to English speakers, are more likely to forget the agent of an action when the action is not intentional (or when it is an accident), such as popping a balloon. Much like Japanese speakers, Spanish speakers tend to use intransitive expressions to describe this sort of situation. Based on experiments such as this, we see that language structures can even effect memory. *3

3. *Jihatsu* (自発) i.e. ‘Spontaneous Passive’

We may encounter a complex expression such as ‘...to *omowareru*’ (と思われる) even in intermediate-level reading materials. We translate it as ‘it seems to me...’ usually without explaining why. Of course, ‘*Omowareru*’ is a passive form but has no passive meaning. In fact, Japanese language instructors have consistently ignored the *Jihatsu* form ever since the beginning of its pedagogical history. I think this has happened because the occurrence of *Jihatsu* is fairly limited in modern Japanese, which means that it is as an exceptional case. The use of *Jihatsu* is limited to verbs that communicate emotion, such as ‘*omou*’ ‘*kanjiru*’ ‘*shinpaisuru*.’ However, as I will detail below, we have been paying a great cost in the classroom for ignoring this ‘special case’. First, we need to look back at the history of potential and passive forms in classical Japanese. For example, the potential form of *Miru* (見る) is *Mirareru* (見られる) in modern Japanese. But to many people’s surprise, the potential form did not develop until the Edo period. The poet and scholar of Japanese literature Sadakazu Fujii once asked how people in the Heian period would say the phrase, ‘I can solve this problem’ (この問題を解くことが出来る). *4 He enumerated several possible answers, including この問題を解くことを得, この問題を解きつべし and この問題は解かる, but concluded that they were not likely to use any of these. He was thinking speech like that contained in *Taketori Monogatari* (『竹取物語』) (10th century). In this text he was able to find negative forms of potential verbs (腰なん動かれぬ), but not of affirmative forms. He thus concluded that people at that time had no affirmative potential forms, but he added that they did have ‘spontaneous potential forms’ which would develop into ‘(affirmative) potential forms’ in later periods. For example, in *Taketori Monogatari* the *Jihatsu* form 頼まるるかな (=期待されるなあ) was used instead of 頼むことが出来る or 頼める. In other words, the

Jihatsu of that time was actually more of a *Jihatsu kano* (自発可能=Spontaneous Potential). Although I criticized Japanese language instructors earlier for passing over *Jihatsu*, the famous Haruki Murakami translator Jay Rubin has astutely described this region of Japanese grammar as the ‘misty crossroads where the passive and potential intersect’ *5
 Now let us examine the history of *Jihatsu*. (see Table 2)

Table 2 History of the Passive and Potential

	自発	可能 (肯定)	可能 (否定)	受け身	尊敬
万葉	思ほゆ	えー			
平安	頼まるる 聞こゆ / 見ゆ	←× (ない)	動かれぬ えーず	ーと言わる る人	
江戸		書ける	書けない	書かれる	書かれる
現代	思われる 聞こえる・見える	聞ける・見られる			

We can see the *Jihatsu* form as early as in the *Man'yo shu*. A famous example is 瓜はめば 子供思ほゆ. -ゆ is an old form of る and here indicates *Jihatsu*. At this point, you might recall forms like 聞こゆ or 見ゆ that many Japanese people have learned while taking classical Japanese in high school. Of course, in modern Japanese they are 聞こえる and 見える, respectively. This point can be helpful for Japanese language instructors who have struggled to differentiate the two forms for ‘can see’ (and ‘can hear’) (見える・見られる). As I wrote above, the potential form as such finally appeared in Edo period. It was probably because the *Izenkei* had lost its function by that time, allowing the form to take on a potential function. Knowing the history of *Jihatsu* makes it much easier to understand and explain the two different forms in contemporary Japanese that signify similar types of potentiality.

4. Passive, Suffering Passive and Honorific Passive

Examining this notion of *Jihatsu* helps us better understand not only the two types of potential forms (*Mieru/Mirareru* etc.) but also other important grammatical forms. Susumu Ohno once wrote, in connection with Japanese people’s views of Nature, that the most fundamental component of the passive in Japanese is the fact that an action is done *naturally*, as if it is a part of Nature, and cannot be controlled. *6 This is the same idea that forms the basis of *Jihatsu*. An example of the so-called suffering passive (also called the ‘indirect passive’) is ‘あいつに俺の酒を飲まれた,’ which can be translated as ‘He drank my rice wine and I was not able to control his action.’ Hence, the sentence expresses my strong displeasure. Another example of a passive sentence is ‘大野先生は杯を手にとられた,’ which can be translated as ‘Dr. Ohno picked up the vessel of rice wine and the action was performed as if it was a part of nature and I could not interfere with it in any way.’ The speaker regards Dr. Ohno’s action as one that is absolute and naturally occurring, and

as a result the expression becomes honorific. In this way, two of the most difficult grammatical concepts—suffering passive and honorific passive—can be explained persuasively to learners of Japanese in higher education and, of course, to instructors as well.

Furthermore, expressions such as ...することになった、話せるようになりたい (in contrast to 話せたい) and 本をお読みになる can also be understood through this idea of ‘natural occurrence.’ Japanese speakers tend to describe a situation as a natural occurrence as opposed to an intentional action. We often avoid using an intentional expression like ...ことにする. Also, an incorrect sentence such as 日本語が話せたい, which English speakers often use, can be explained easily through this idea of ‘natural occurrence.’ Another honorific form, お...になる can also be explained in the same way.

5. Language *and* Culture

Recognizing the interconnectedness of language and culture, we need to move beyond the disciplinary mechanisms that have worked to separate these two fields. In the past, culture was traditionally the domain of anthropology and then we began to teach language *and* culture, providing students with ‘culture capsules’ that were basically groups of factual information. However, now we should teach language by drawing on examples of culture that are inseparable from the language or modes of thought of the target language. Currently there is no doubt that the main objective of language learning is ‘Intercultural Competence.’ *7 Everybody agrees that we should teach culture through language. However, I would like to emphasize here that language itself, particularly grammar in this case, is an embodiment of the culture to which it ‘belongs.’ If each new grammatical concept were introduced and interpreted in terms of its cultural context, learning grammar would be more interesting and, of course, easier.

6. Instinct or ‘Preadaptation?’

The idea that human thought and cognition are determined by language is called ‘linguistic determinism.’ Starting with Sapir-Whorf hypothesis in the early 20th century, this idea has been restated with varying degrees of strength. Generative grammarians such as Steven Pinker have criticized its stronger formations, but the weak hypothesis that the categorization of notions differs according to language and culture still seems to be valid. Pinker insists that human beings have a universal grammar in their brain and that language is a part of human instinct. He has tried to enumerate the various similarities of the grammatical structures of all languages. Such scholars are strongly opposed to relativism and skeptical about positions adopted by cultural anthropologists. Furthermore, Pinker favorably introduced the ideas of the anthropologist Donald E. Brown, whose notion of ‘the universal people’ took universalism beyond universal grammar into the realm of culture, behavior, and so on. *8 However, it has been proven by research into cognition that we are in fact ‘slaves of language’—that is, we are strongly bound by our own language. This is not to say that there is nothing innate about language. As Jeff Elman has argued, language is innate in the limited sense that genetics pre-specify processing systems of information and control the timing of language learning in our brains. *9 However, the theory of universal grammar has no way of

reconciling the significant cognitive differences observed between speakers of different languages. If there is no universal ‘language organ,’ then how do we acquire language? The most persuasive explanation at this moment is the idea of ‘preadaptation.’ Preadaptation was first developed by evolutionary scientists and refers to applying a function that exists for one purpose to another different purpose. For example, feathers used to exist in order to preserve the body temperature of animals but later on they were used to fly. More relevant to the current topic, the voice that apes used to warn their brethren came to be used to express more complex meanings. Of course, cumulative cultural evolution and long-time interaction among a group of speakers are necessary for language to ‘get off the ground’ beyond the initial stages of preadaptation. As far as the practical task of language instruction is concerned, it is enough to know that culture is represented by language to some degree, that language and culture are not two separate realms.

7. Language, Brain and Mind

In any case, human beings have acquired language through the process of evolution, regardless of whether or not it is ‘universal.’ We can convey messages to others using language, which is one of the major functions of language: communication. However, thanks to language, human beings are able to express things objectively—or more precisely, they are able to position things and ideas outside of, or apart from, themselves. This is what enabled humans to think abstractly. According to Ikegaya, animals have a cognitive system that monitors other animals that they encounter in order to judge if they are enemies or not. Early humans used a similar system to monitor other humans and animals in order to survive, too. But later they must have developed the skill of ‘mind-reading’ or inferring the intentions of others, not just judging if they signify threats or not. It would not have taken a very long time for them to alter this system in order to enable them to look into their own minds. Ikegaya argues that this development marks the beginning of consciousness or ‘mind.’ *10 And as you may have already guessed, this is also a splendid example of preadaptation in human evolution. However, it was not long ago that humans first developed such a monitoring system, which I will show through a discussion of the development of the concept of *kokoro* (心, ‘mind’) in the context of ancient China.

8. As a Final Remark

The Noh actor Noboru Yasuda once argued that people in ancient China only began to recognize 心 (= mind) relatively recently within the lengthy unfolding of Chinese history and culture. His theory has not yet been proven, but it is worth mentioning here due to its implications for our understanding of the origin of language or mind. Yasuda was struck by this realization while reading Confucius’s *Analects*, or *Lunyu* (『論語』). The most famous aphorism from the text reads, ‘子曰、吾十有五而志乎學、三十而立、四十而不惑、五十而知天命、六十而耳順、七十而從心所欲、不踰矩’ (The Master said, ‘At fifteen, I had my mind bent on learning. At thirty, I stood firm. At forty, I had no doubts. At fifty, I knew the decrees of Heaven. At sixty, my ear was an obedient organ for the reception of truth. At seventy, I could follow what my heart desired, without transgressing what was right.’ (<http://ccontext.org/analects/wei-zheng>)). It had been

customary to interpret the underlined part as ‘not lose yourself when you are forty (四十にして惑わらず in Japanese). But one day Yasuda felt that this phrase did not suit the overall style of *The Analects*, and furthermore that it did not reflect his own feelings and experiences in life. Later, he discovered that the character 惑 actually did not exist until after Confucius was already dead. In fact, *The Analects* was compiled by his followers during the Han Period, long after Confucius died. It had been transmitted orally among his followers until it was eventually written down.

If the character 惑 did not exist, how are we to interpret Confucius’s 不惑? Yasuda argued that the character 惑 was pronounced ‘huoㄣˇ’, so the character 惑 must have been mistakenly chosen instead of the character 或, which was also pronounced ‘huoㄣˇ’. If this is the case, what does the phrase mean? 或 is a part of 國 (= country) or 域 (= area; region) and means ‘to form a border’ or ‘to set a limit.’ Yasuda concluded by interpreting the phrase as, ‘At forty, I don’t limit my possibilities.’ *11 I strongly support this interpretation not just because of recent reliable research into Chinese character origins, especially ‘Oracle bone script (=甲骨文字)’, but also because it resonates with Yasuda’s identity as a sincere artist who has continued to evolve.

Shizuka Shirakawa, who was an expert on the history and origins of Chinese characters, confirmed that 惑 did indeed not exist during Confucius’s time. In addition, he contended that the character 心 first appeared 3,000 years ago. But other compound characters that use 心, such as 惑、思、恋、and 悔 did not appear until 2,500 years ago. What does this mean? People at that time in China did not seem to have a strong interest in ideas and activities that involved the mind. Even the character 心 appeared only 3,000 years ago. As a result, we see that the concept of “mind” is relatively recent. We take it for granted that we have a mind or a heart, and that we are different from animals in this regard. But if Yasuda’s theory is true, mind or consciousness—thought by brain scientists to be a function of language is much more contingent than we would often like to believe. Yasuda cited Julian Jaynes’s famous work, *The Origin of Consciousness*, in which Jaynes examined Homer’s *The Iliad* and insisted that Greek people around 800 B.C. had no words that signified mind or a heart, let alone consciousness. Instead they used ‘psyche’ or ‘thumos,’ meaning ‘breath’ and ‘diaphragm’ respectively, in order to express the meaning of ‘soul’ and ‘soul filled with emotions.’ Jaynes argued that ancient humans before roughly 1200 BC were ‘not conscious,’ which is parallel to Yasuda’s theory. *12 In the case of Japan, Japanese people lacked abstract vocabulary until they encountered Chinese civilization and as a result were (and still are) good at expressing things through words that are full of sensation, such as onomatopoeia. It should come as no surprise, then, that people who were not inclined towards abstract thinking (as Japanese people were not) did not develop the concept of mind until recently. Can free will exist where there is no consciousness? And how was language used to describe things prior to the development of consciousness?

With the help of neuroscience and cognitive science, we can continue to explore these questions.

Notes

1. Boroditsky, 2011.
2. 池上嘉彦(1981)
3. Fausey, Long and Boroditsky, 2010.
4. 藤井貞和(1984)
5. Rubin, 1998.
6. 大野晋(1987)
7. Furstenberg, 2010.
8. Pinker, 2002.
9. Elman, Bates, and Johnson, 1996.
10. 池谷裕二(2009)
11. 安田登(2009)
12. Jaynes, 1976.

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