

Cohesion and Participant Tracking in Japanese:

An Interpretation Based
on Five Registers

by

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of English, Linguistics and Media
Macquarie University

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Midori Fukuhara". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Midori" and last name "Fukuhara" clearly distinguishable.

Midori Fukuhara

May 2002

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the construction of texture in Japanese, in particular with resources related to the general area of cohesion and particular aspects of participant tracking. An investigation is here presented as to the degree to which conventional views adequately represent Japanese in the light of authentic data. Such statements as "WA marks Given information", "GA marks New information", "zero is a pronoun in Japanese" are common throughout the literature characterising Japanese texts, but there is reason to believe that they stem, at least in part, from a naive transfer of English grammars, in particular, those with a narrow focus on the sentence. This thesis proposes a new framework for the description of Japanese; and in this proposal, an essential dimension is a detailed account of relevant contextual factors, both linguistic and non-linguistic. The aim is to offer a description of Japanese more defensible to Japanese speakers, that is, to represent Japanese "in its own terms".

Chapter 1 sets out problems and issues in the related literature on Japanese cohesion. It also addresses issues that are seen to be most pressing in relation to the description of Japanese. The chapter gives a brief account of the resources for cohesion and referential tracking and the particular deployment in Japanese, so that it offers a provisional account of the meaning potential for Japanese speakers.

Chapter 2 reviews several standard treatments of cohesion and participant tracking in Japanese. This review is organised around two different kinds of resources, that is, those pre-predicate elements (such as WA, GA and other particles), and those post-predicate elements (such as conjunctive particles and certain sentence final expressions).

Chapter 3 explains the method undertaken here and the conventions of analysis employed in subsequent descriptions of texts from five separate contexts. Methods are set so as not only to view choices synoptically, but also to try to give careful description of choices in the logogenetic reality of text. That means the choices are viewed as being available to the speaker, writer or reader, as they unfold in text time.

In each of Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, one of the following four texts, a ① Marco Polo Text, ② Bean Scattering Day Text, ③ University Lecture Text and ④ Family Conversation Text, is analysed and discussed in detail. The texts are chosen for the detailed examination of four different registers, representing a continuum from most written-like to most spoken-like, as well as continua of other kinds (like hierarchically differentiated social distance and formality differentiated). Each chapter has two major components, the first of which looks at subject realisations from the perspective of referential progression, and the second of which looks at the text from the perspective of subject/referent sequencing. Furthermore, these issues concerning subject are mapped against the macro structures individually for the three "writerly" texts (Texts ① - ③).

In Chapter 8, generalisations are proposed, based on the results of the investigations of these four texts; and then, those principles, as they have emerged from the preceding arguments, are tested on a further study: ⑤ the University Tutorial Text, a text which combines characteristics across the continuum from most written to most spoken. (It is both strongly dialogic as well as involving sustained spoken 'turns'.) In Chapter 9, findings of the analytical chapters are further distilled. The outline for a new, although provisional, model of cohesion in Japanese is set out. These findings suggest future directions for research projects as well.

Japanese seems to have rich resources for creating what Halliday & Hasan (1985) call "organic relations". These have tended to receive less attention than what Halliday & Hasan call "componential relations", which, while inevitably contributing to cohesive ties in Japanese, do not in their own right account for the coherence that the native speaker can consistently monitor from the text. Findings from this study suggest that descriptions of Japanese have suffered from universalising of categories and the emphasis on explicit components. We need to develop our methods for tracking those interdependent relations in texts which provide scaffolding for our predictions and expectancies. These interdependencies do not remain static from one textual environment to another, but, as a system, provide Japanese speaker, hearer, writer and reader, with the power to predict what is coming and to interpret what has already been traversed.

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