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Drodzy Czytelnicy.

Niniejszy specjalny zeszyt *Silva Iaponicarum* 日林 to kolejny z serii naszych tomów powarsztatowych. Zawiera on artykuły powstałe po spotkaniu w trakcie Międzynarodowych Studenckich Warsztatów Japonistycznych, które odbyły się w Żerkowie w dniach 10-15 maja 2011 roku. Organizacją tego wydarzenia zajęli się tym razem, z pomocą kadry naukowej, studenci z Koła Naukowego IAPONICA CREATIVA, działającego przy Zakładzie Japonistyki Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu.

Tym razem na zeszyt specjalny złożyły się jedynie dwa teksty z dziedziny językoznawstwa, jakie przeszły przez nowy tryb recenzji i redakcji artykułów naszego kwartalnika. Jednocześnie to pierwszy tom wydany w nieco zmienionym układzie graficznym. Zwracamy również uwagę, że w ramach wprowadzonych zmian, odtąd do publikacji przyjmujemy artykuły jedynie z angielskim streszczeniem i profilem autora.

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Dear Readers,

This is a special issue of *Silva Iaponicarum* 日林, the next of the series of post-workshop volumes. It presents the output of the Students' International Japanese Studies Workshop, which was held in Żerków on May 10-15, 2011. The workshop was organized by the students' circle IAPONICA CREATIVA with the assistance of the staff from the Japanese Studies Department of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań.

This special issue includes only two papers on Japanese linguistics, which went through the new procedure of content review and edition that we had adopted. At the same time, it is the first fascicle of *Silva* with slightly changed graphical layout. We would also like to draw your attention to the fact, that after the latest changes the article proposal with only English summary and the author's profile will be required for publication.

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Cracow – Poznań – Toruń – Warsaw – Kuki
June 2013

読者の皆様へ

季刊誌「*Silva Iaponicarum* 日林」の特別号をお届けします。本号は、2011年5月10-15日にかけてジェルクフ（ポーランド）で催された国際日本学科合同合宿における会議の成果をまとめた論文集（第3巻）です。2011年の合宿はアダム・ミツケヴィチ大学（ポズナニ）日本語学科の〔IAPONICA CREATIVA〕研究・教育スタッフの協力の下、研究グループの学生と学科が企画運営しました。

本冊子には、季刊誌の査読と編集の新しい手続きを言語学の論文2本しか掲載できませんでした。と同時に、これは若干の変更が加えられた装丁で刊行される最初の号でもあります。その他さまざまな変更がなされた結果、今後、発表の対象として受理するのは、英語の要約と著者紹介が付された論文に限られる旨、ここにお断り申し上げます。

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Less is Better – on Japanese Parts of Speech

ABSTRACT

It may be interesting to note that while there are many grammars of Japanese, including those written by the Japanese and the non-Japanese authors, there seems to be no compromise on the division of the Japanese language semantic elements into the parts of speech. In this paper, this difficult problem is perhaps not entirely and definitely solved. Instead, some premises and proposals regarding the minimalist kind of an approach, based on basic distinction of four classes of lexical elements, have been presented. This, as far as the author is concerned, enables more coherent view at the lexical of elements of the Japanese language, at the same time not excluding further classification of the material into particular lexical sub-categories.

KEYWORDS: Japanese grammar, morphology, parts of speech, classification.

The concept of parts of speech is crucial for dealing correctly with the meaningful elements of a language. Parts of speech are useful both for the learners of a language, who need models enabling them to understand the unfamiliar grammatical phenomena of a foreign code, and for native language users, who intuitively classify and use the meaningful elements of a code according to the rules of its grammatical system. In this article a concept of the lowest possible number of Japanese parts of speech will be presented, with special emphasis on its usefulness for the final users of such a classification.

Points of View

While the above-mentioned properties related to the concept of parts of speech may be considered obvious, different classification methodologies exist in linguistics. The following three seem to be the most common.

1. SEMANTIC (*imiteki kijun* 意味の基準) – related to meaning(s).
2. MORPHOLOGICAL (*keishikiteki kijun* 形式的基準) – related to the inflection paradigm(s).
3. SYNTACTIC (*ronriteki/ tōgoteki kijun* 論理的・統語の基準) – related to the role(s) in text and co-text (cf. Lyons 1989 Vol. 2: 52, Polański 1995: 92-94, Tanaka 1988: 469-471).

As can be seen, points of view may vary, according both to the attitude of researchers and to the actual properties of parts of speech in a given code.

The Advantages

Various classifications reveal numerous advantages.

The SEMANTIC approach may be related to the obvious fact that language users usually know by intuition what a part of speech means in general (whether it denotes an idea of a – more-or-less tangible – object, the object's property or an action). It is necessary to note that this phenomenon is based on ANALOGY rather than ANOMALY.

According to the approach based primarily on MORPHOLOGY, a part of speech paradigm is usually fairly clear for a native language user, being self-evident (one-element paradigms to be included). ANOMALIES may and do happen, but it is the ANALOGY rule that supports the existence of a paradigm.

The SYNTACTIC approach should be considered the most advanced and covers a wide range of possible actual usages. Such usages may be linked to the SEMANTIC and MORPHOLOGICAL properties of a given part of speech, although, as is demonstrated below, this regularity may not necessarily function in the opposite direction.

The Deficiencies

Different attitudes reveal certain deficiencies.

The SEMANTIC approach is most useful at the basic level of classification, obscuring some properties of objects in question. It is virtually impossible to give a finite list of semantic dimensions. (Bańczerowski et al. 1982: 198-214). Some significant properties of parts of speech, including, among others, their auxiliary usage, cannot be explained in a satisfactory manner according to this approach.

The implementation of a MORPHOLOGICAL approach may unfortunately not always be possible. This occurs mainly due to the lack of declension/ conjugation patterns in a given code. In other words, it should be cautioned here not to ask a user of an isolating language about their paradigms. Furthermore, one-element paradigms may also exist in inflectional languages.

The SYNTACTIC approach proves useless in case of numerous ANOMALIES concerning different secondary properties of elements recognized wrongly as revealing the same primary syntactic function. As an example, the primary function of a noun is often recognized as the

subject of a sentence, despite its common occurrence (at least in English, Polish or Japanese) as an object (direct or indirect) or modifier (including adverbial modifiers). ANOMALIES may exist both between different codes and in one code. Parts of speech may be used differently in various syntactic patterns. It may hence be postulated that perhaps the SYNTACTIC approach should not be used in order to determine the basic properties of parts of speech. Further evidence in favour of such an approach is presented, clearly in an unintentional manner, by Martin (1988: 32-33), whose view of Japanese grammar from the perspective of nuclear, simplex and converted sentences is far from convincing, obscuring numerous semantic and morphological properties of lexical units.

A Mixed Approach – Premises

As a remedy for the numerous deficiencies listed above, a MIXED approach is necessary to deal with parts of speech. It may be postulated that SEMANTIC (lexical) properties of parts of speech should be applied at the basic (and: extremely limited) level of classification. This kind of distinction is rudimentary: ideas (eventually: things) are expressed by NOUNS, activities and states of noun designates – by VERBS, while the properties and limitations of nouns and verbs are marked by ADJECTIVES and ADVERBS (should adverbs be viewed as parts of speech), respectively. Since, as mentioned above, a complete list of semantic dimensions is unavailable, a more advanced description of lexical elements may be based on their MORPHOLOGICAL and SYNTACTIC (systematic) properties. Such properties reveal numerous regularities (repeatable patterns), which may be described, researched and compared in a relatively easy manner, while not obscuring unavoidable irregularities and differences. Due to the above-mentioned anomalies in the SYNTACTIC approach, MORPHOLOGICAL properties (if only available in a language), as less complicated and more analogous, may also be a good starting point for classification. In the case of the Japanese language, the MORPHOLOGICAL properties of lexical units are an obvious choice for the basic level of description. For this reason, the SYNTACTIC description may serve as its natural supplement, but should never precede the MORPHOLOGICAL classification. This is also why the Japanese traditional category of *rentaishi* 連体詞 is not recognized below as a separate class of lexemes, since their basic syntactic property of preceding nominal elements would not obscure their morphological properties (contemporarily not valid anymore, but resulting from historical facts).

Less over More

As the main premise, analogies should be preferred over anomalies in the mixed approach. The highest level of abstraction on which generalizations are made should be preferred in the first place. Minor incompatibilities may (and should) be investigated on a low level of abstraction. In other words, major compatibilities, rather than minor incompatibilities, should be favoured in the mixed approach.

Basic (clear-cut) categories may further be divided into sub-categories, provided there are reasons to do so. It should always be clear both what is subject to division and for what reason the division is made.

The above-mentioned requirements for the mixed approach to parts of speech are often overridden in contemporary descriptions of the Japanese language. This is done for various reasons and purposes.

The school textbook description of Japanese grammar (Kindaichi et al. 1988: 171), based mainly on syntactic premises, enumerates 10 classes of parts of speech, including the above mentioned rather illusionary categories as *rentaishi* 連体詞 ‘noun modifiers’. Another category of interest in the classical Japanese approach are *kandōshi* 感動詞 ‘exclamations’, which could with no significant consequences be viewed as a sub-category of nouns or adverbs, due to their rather pragmatic (not: semantic) reference and syntactic independence resulting from this fact.

An alternative contemporary Japanese source presents 14 classes of parts of speech (Kiyose 1995: 9), based on semantic and morphological criteria. One of the most radical non-Japanese descriptions of Japanese, lists only 5 categories (Miller 1967: 308-355), based mainly on syntax, while the most up-to-date Polish description, also syntactically oriented, enumerates 13 parts of speech, (Huszczka et al. 1998: 220-232). As further investigation reveals, all the classifications quoted above include grammatical elements of the code and focus on conjugable rather than on non-conjugable elements of the Japanese lexicon.

A Minimalist Approach: Four Classes of Japanese Lexicon

A minimalist approach to Japanese parts of speech may probably be the closest to the one proposed by Miller (ibid.) The following four basic categories of the lexicon may be considered heterogeneous enough to one another to be listed as different parts of speech, on the SEMANTIC, MORPHOLOGICAL and SYNTACTIC levels, At the same time, they internally form units homogeneous enough to be recognized as clear-cut classes of the Japanese lexicon:

NOUNS (with their sub-classes),
 VERBS (with their sub-classes),
 ADJECTIVES (with their sub-classes),
 ADVERBS (if any).

Contrary to Miller's classification, the Japanese parts of speech other than those mentioned above are considered grammatical modifiers, acting solely as auxiliary elements and not bearing any independent meaning (according to the Japanese traditional classification being *ji* 辞, not *shi* 詞). Another important amendment to Miller's approach is a re-definition of the noun category, which has, so far, been overlooked by grammarians.

NOUNS

Japanese nouns do not differ substantially from nouns in other languages as to their SEMANTIC (pointing at objects or ideas) and SYNTACTICAL (serving as sentence subjects and objects) properties. Their important MORPHOLOGICAL property, traditionally overlooked by Japanese grammarians, is declension. One declension pattern with 15 cases may be defined, with some minor and easily definable exceptions (cf. Jabłoński 2012). In other words, it is not the case particles that are investigated as independent elements, but their fully functional and systematic adnominal uses (treated above as coherent word units and written as one word in Hepburn romanization). The Japanese nominative case marker is recognized as morphological zero, in accordance both with its actual use (not to be wrongly associated with marking sentence subjects, but with naming objects) and with its morphological form, which is traditionally recognized as a basic and natural reference to other forms of the Japanese nominal paradigm.

ENGLISH	POLISH	CASE MARKER(S)
*NOMinative	mianownik	<i>N</i> (morphological zero)
THEmative	podmiotnik	<i>Nwa</i> (<i>Nnara</i>)
RHEmative	przedmiotnik	<i>Nga</i> (<i>Nkoso</i> , <i>Ndake</i> , <i>Nbakari</i> , <i>Nnomi</i> , <i>Nshika</i> , <i>Nkurai</i> / <i>Ngurai</i>)
DIStinctive	wyróżnik	<i>Nmo</i> (<i>Nsae</i> , <i>Ndemo</i> , <i>Ntomo</i> , <i>Ndatte</i> , <i>Nsura</i>)
ENUmerative	wylicznik	<i>Nto</i> (<i>Ntoshite</i>)
EXEmplicative	ogólnik	<i>Nya</i> (<i>Nyara</i> , <i>Nnado</i> , <i>Nnante</i> , <i>Nnari</i> , <i>Ndano</i>)

VOC ative	wołacz	<i>Nyo (Nya)</i>
INT errogative	pytajnik	<i>Nka</i>
* GEN itive	dopełniacz	<i>Nno</i>
* ACC usative	biernik	<i>N'o</i>
* INS trumental	narzędnik	<i>Nde</i>
* LOC ative	miejscownik	<i>Nni (Nnite, Nniyotte, Nioite)</i>
TER minative	ogranicznik	<i>Nmade (Nmadeni)</i>
ALL ative	odsyłacz	<i>N'e</i>
ABL ative	oddalacz	<i>Nkara (Nyori)</i>

Several noun sub-classes may be described, with the following possible members:

1. Regular nouns (fully declinable and used as sentence subjects) (*naka* 中, *keizai* 経済, *terebi* テレビ).
2. Auxiliary nouns (usually with fixed SYNTACTIC usage – to be divided further by function and described as systematic modifiers – see below) (*no* の, *koto* こと, *-kata* 方, *hazu* はず, *tame* ため, *ototoi* 一昨日).
3. Pronominal elements (with various deictic properties, including both Miller's prenouns and interrogatives as well as so-called personal pronouns) (*kono* この – solely in GEN case, *watashi* 私, *donata* どなた).
4. Quantity nouns (with fixed SEMANTIC function) (*ichi* 一, *hitotsu* 一つ, *ichiban* 一番, *-mai* 枚, *-hiki* 匹, *-kai* 階, *-soku* 足).
5. Iconic nouns (usually in GEN or ENU or in adverbial position (*chiratto* ちらっと, *gussuri* ぐっすり, *perapera* ぺらぺら).
6. Noun-adjectives (mostly in GEN and LOC: *kara* 空, *tokubetsu* 特別, *midori* 緑).

Declension makes it possible to investigate the relations between the morphology and syntax of nominal paradigms. This also applies to the theme/rheme elements recognized in a traditional (though, perhaps, not necessarily in the most effective manner) as the so-called *kakarijoshi* 係助詞 (a class of particles traditionally differentiated from case particles).

The thematic case *Nwa* [THE] is used to introduce a known designate and mention its general properties (or facts other than typical and expected) (*Sorawa* [THE] *kurai*. 空は暗い。'The sky is dark.' *Amewa* [THE] *furanai*. 雨は降らない。'It is not raining.')

The rhematic case *Nga* [RHE] is used to introduce a new designate and to comment on facts (rather expected, than not), not its obvious properties

(*Kono hitoga* [RHE] *yatta*. この人がやった。'He/she did it.' *Amega* [RHE] *furu*. 雨が降る。'It is raining.')

The distinctive case *Nmo* [DIS] is used for emphasis (*Oremo* [DIS] *iku*. 俺も行く。'I am going, too.' *Dekimo* [DIS] *shinai*. できもしない。'They cannot even do it.')

With the use of examples of another language, that is, Polish, in which declension is traditionally used in the description of nouns, it may be noted that the above MORPHOLOGICAL oppositions function in exactly the same way as the Polish genitive case in the SYNTACTICAL marking of affirmative and negative sentences.

The nominative case (in the position of the subject, in existential sentences) or the accusative case (in the position of object position) is used in affirmative Polish sentences (*Tam są ludzie*. 'There are **people** [NOM] there. *Weź siekiere*. 'Take **the axe** [ACC].')

The genitive case is used in negative sentences, especially those marking the non-existence of an object (*Ludzi* [GEN] *tam nie ma*. 'There are **no people** there.' *Nie dotykaj siekiery* [GEN]. 'Do not touch **the axe**.') While the usage of GEN in the sentences marking the non-existence of objects could be recognized as exceptional, this extends also to the direct objects of verbs semantically marking the non-existence (cf. *szukać* 'to look for', *wyglądać* 'look forward to': *szukać pracy/domu/rozwiązania* 'to look for **a job/a home/a solution**' [GEN]). The same direct objects appear in the ACC case with verbs marking the existence of the designates (cf. *znaleźć* 'to find': *znaleźć pracę/dom/rozwiązanie* 'to find **a job/a home/a solution** [ACC]).

VERBS

The SEMANTIC (pointing at activities and states) and SYNTACTICAL (serving primarily as sentence predicates) properties of Japanese verbs do not require further insight. Verbs are subject to conjugation (2 conjugational patterns with 2 irregular verbs and other minor irregularities). They also reveal significantly less perceptive (distinguishing between information experienced on one's own and information perceived – not directly accessible) properties than adjectives. Verbs are commonly analysed in the first place in sources on Japanese grammar, which illustrates their traditionally perceived superiority over nouns (traditionally considered non-inflected).

Several verb sub-classes may be described, with the following possible members:

1. Regular verbs (functioning as predicates) (*taberu* 食べる, *miru* 見る, *kaku* 書く).
2. Auxiliary verbs (or sometimes: verb uses), incl. copula (*de aru* である, *iku* いく, *kuru* くる, *iru* いる, *aru* ある), – to be divided further by function and described as systematic modifiers – see below.
3. Directional (incl. donatory) verbs (with auxiliary uses of the latter).
4. Lexicalized instances of primarily verbal elements (the so-called defective verbs, revealing morphological or semantic irregularities: *kitaru*, *taishita*, *susunde* etc.).

ADJECTIVES

Japanese adjectives SEMANTICALLY point at the properties of names and SYNTACTICALLY may function as attributes or predicate components. The property of their partial conjugability is traditionally recognized by Japanese grammarians as an opposition between the conjugable and the non-conjugable adjectives (*keiyōshi* 形容詞 and *keiyōdōshi* 形容動詞, respectively), but due to the similarities in their functions mentioned above, this MORPHOLOGICAL distinction may be considered secondary (irrelevant at the basic level of classification). Non-conjugable adjectives are close to noun-adjectives.

There are some possibilities of the adjective sub-classes:

1. Regular adjectives (conjugable and functioning as predicates) vs. non-conjugable adjectives (the same SEMANTIC and SYNTACTIC features, different MORPHOLOGY) (*fukai*, *takai*, *omoshiroi* vs. *kirei*, *shizuka*), with INCIDENTAL instances of morphs used in both forms: cf. *ōkii* 大きい vs. *ōki na* 大きな).
2. Auxiliary adjectives (*-nai* ない, *-tai* たい etc.) – to be divided further by function and described as systematic modifiers – see below. While they do not constitute independent lexical units, the fact that at least a significant part of Japanese verb conjugational paradigm (MORPHOLOGY) is based on the adjective conjugation pattern seems to make this distinction justified.
3. Perceptive adjectives (marking the information directly perceived by the narrator and mostly conjugable) *ureshii* 嬉しい, *itai* いたい, *kowai* 怖い, *iya* 嫌: revealing the imperceptive verbal part of their paradigm) and imperceptive adjectives (*akai* 赤い, *ii* 良い, *atarashii* 新しい).

ADVERBS

Adverbs are present in the conception of Japanese school grammar. From the SEMANTICAL point of view they express ideas (*gainengo* 概念語), but function as supplementary elements (*fukuyōgo* 副用語) (Tanaka 1988: 470).

The following adverb sub-classes may be listed in Japanese:

1. Regular adverbs (strong, specialized) – relatively few (*totemo* とても, *zehi* 是非, *chōdo* ちょうど).
2. Adverbial forms of other parts of speech (quasi-adverbs, weak, adapted adverbs) – numerous and regular – reveal adverbial properties of the verbal/adjective paradigm (*tanoshiku* 楽しく, *oishiku* おいしく, *kirei ni* きれいに). They, for the reasons of semantic and morphological nature, should be described as members of their original categories (verbs and adjectives, respectively) and are listed here as adverbs only due to relatively few representatives of regular adverbs in Japanese to the clearly adverbial character of their syntactical properties.

As to the MORPHOLOGY, at least the quasi-adverbs are gradable, though the regular adverbs are rather not (the alternative approach, allowing the comparative and superlative degree of the unit *totemo* to be recognized as *motto* もっと and *ichiban* 一番, respectively, is far from convincing). All adverbs reveal fixed SYNTACTIC properties, always functioning as dependent elements.

Class Boundaries and Transitions

Numerous links between classes of the lexicon and between paradigms exist, enabling them to be adjusted to specific syntactic needs. The implementation of a mixed description model requires also the overt recognition of such links, which make the transitions between categories possible. This does not undermine the basic premise that the lexical categories should be perceived as self-evident and disjunctive – and they indeed are disjunctive at the basic level of classification. It is possible (and probably also convincing) to view such phenomena in terms of derivation, although their influence on the overall view on the systematic morphological properties of a language seems to be underestimated.

The following table (on the upper part of next page) lists the most typical examples of categorial transitions.

NOUNS to:	VERBS <i>N + suru</i> <i>N + ni naru</i> (<i>ev. N + -ru</i>)	ADJECTIVES <i>N + no yō na</i>	ADVERBS <i>N + no yō ni</i>
VERBS to:	NOUNS <i>V + no,</i> <i>V + koto</i>	ADJECTIVES V attributive position	ADVERBS <i>V + te</i> (gerund) <i>V + -nagara</i>
ADJECTIVES to:	NOUNS <i>Adj + sa, + mi</i> <i>Adj + (na) no</i>	VERBS <i>Adj + -ku nar(u),</i> <i>Adj + ni nar(u)</i> perceptive: <i>-gar(u)</i>	ADVERBS <i>Adj + -ku,</i> <i>Adj + ni</i>
ADVERBS to:	NOUNS, VERBS and ADJECTIVES (<i>only weak Adv, within the Adj paradigm</i>)		

Systematic Modifiers

The lack of lexical meaning is a gradable property, which constitutes the reason why at least some relations between the lexemes and auxiliary modifiers should be preserved and described (cf. the auxiliary elements of the categories listed above). The most important division exists between the PARTS OF SPEECH (that are subject to modification) and MODIFIERS (implemented in order to modify the parts of speech and are not subject to modification themselves). Examples of modifier sub-categories follow.

1. Division by **functional range**: sentence, phrase, single element.
2. Division by **collocation**: noun, verb modifiers etc.
3. Division by **meaning**: temporal, modal, aspectual modifiers etc.

Syntactic Positions

Operating at the level of SYNTAX is possible only after SEMANTIC and MORPHOLOGICAL classification is complete. In other cases, the classification may end up with an endless investigation of syntactical incompatibilities in SEMANTIC or MORPHOLOGICAL properties, which are incompatible by their very nature.

There are several positions that a part of speech may take in syntax. The most important positions are listed below. Different speech parts may take

certain positions. This particular fact does not change the part's primary (SEMANTIC AND MORPHOLOGICAL) categorization.

SUBJECT POSITION

Subject position is taken by nouns, most often in the thematic (*Nwa*), rhemative (*Nga*) and distinctive case (*Nmo*). Multi-element subject phrases may contain elements in enumerative, exemplificative and interrogative cases, combined with thematic, rhemative, distinctive, or, in some usages final exemplificative case element (*nado*) (*Nto/Nya/Nka Nwa/ga/mo/nado*).

Akizorawa kirei da. 秋空はきれいだ。‘The autumn sky is beautiful.’

Jikanga hoshii. 時間がほしい。‘[I] need time.’

Okanega nai. お金がない。‘[I] am out of money.’

Ofuromo nai. お風呂もない。‘[They] don’t even have a bath.’

Jisho ya hyakkajiten nado ga atta. 辞書や百貨辞典などがあつた。‘[They had] dictionaries, encyclopedias and the like.’

The nominative case is not used in the position of the subject in Japanese (it is used instead to label and denominate, according to its primary and obvious function in the declensional system). More detailed classification may distinguish between thematic, rhemative and distinctive instances of Japanese subject counterparts.

OBJECT POSITION

This is the typical and primarily position for nouns in cases other than thematic (*Nwa*), rhemative (*Nga*) and distinctive (*Nmo*), excluding vocative: syntactically independent (used in isolated contexts).

Shimbun’o katta. 新聞を買った。‘[I] bought a newspaper.’

Oyajini tazuneta. 親父に尋ねた。‘[I] asked [my] father.’

Ekini iru. 駅にいる。‘[I] am at the station.’

Hanato chiru. 花と散る。‘Fall as a flower.’

Yamadato mōshimasu. 山田と申します。‘[My] name is Yamada.’

Mise’e itte kita. 店へ行ってきた。‘[I] was in the store.’

Nagoyakara kita. 名古屋から来た。‘[I] came from Nagoya.’

Himode musunda. 紐で結んだ。‘[I] tied [it] with a string.’

Futsukamade kakaru. 二日までかかる。‘[It] is going to take time until the second day [of the month].’

The position of the object is the second verb terminal position (first is the subject) and as such serves as a verb (predicate) modifier. It may also appear as an element of attributive phrases.

The thematic and distinctive case properties may override the primary requirements of object position marking or function as secondary case markers in the objective position, which is visible in the following examples. This does not change the primary object position of the respective noun elements, which function as the secondary, not the primary arguments of main verbs of the example phrases.

Shimbun'o katta. '[I] bought a newspaper.' vs. *Shimbunwa katta.* 'As to the newspaper, [I] bought it.'

Oyajini tazuneta. '[I] asked my father.' vs. *Oyajiniwa tazuneta.* 'As to my father, [I] asked him.] (...)

PREDICATE POSITION

This position may be taken by any element but the adverb. In the linear organization of a sentence it usually functions as the last element of a sentence or phrase. Final sentence modifiers should be considered the predicate elements.

Kodomowa oroka da. 子供は愚かだ。 'Children are stupid.'

Inuga suki da. 犬が好きだ。 '[I] like dogs.'

Tanaka desu. 田中です。 '[My] name is Tanaka.'

Eigawa omoshirokatta. 映画はおもしろかった。 'The film was good.'

Amega futte iru. 雨が降っている。 'It is raining.'

Tabakowa nai. タバコはない。 '[I] am out of cigarettes.'

Omiyage'o katte kite kureta. お土産を買ってきてくれた。 [Someone] brought [us] a present.'

The non-conjugable (including declinable) elements are supplied with copula in the predicate position. As may be noted, the nouns in this position always appear in the nominative case (as nominal predicates).

ATTRIBUTE POSITION

This is a noun (subject or object) modifier position. The attribute position may be taken by any elements (including nouns themselves) but adverbs.

Kawaii akachan. かわいい赤ちゃん。‘A sweet [little] baby.’

Kirei na shokki. きれいな食器。‘Clean dishes.’

Gaishutsu shinai taipu. 外出しないタイプ。‘[The one who] does not go out.’

Kara no hako. 空の箱。‘An empty box.’

Watashi no kasa. 私の傘。‘My umbrella.’

Kinō no hanashi. 機能の話。‘The things [I mentioned] yesterday.’

Genkisō na kodomotachi. 元気そうな子供たち。‘Vigorous children.’

The adjectives and verbs used to appear in the attributive position in their attributive forms (historically: *rentaikei* 連体形, which frequently used to be a subject to declension itself; currently indistinguishable from the final form). The nouns function in the genitive case in this position.

ADVERBIAL POSITION

The adverbial position may be considered a predicate modifier position. As such, it appears as the most typical (and the only suitable one) for adverbs.

Totemo tanoshikatta. とても楽しかった。‘[It] was fun.’

Takusan arimasu. たくさんあります。‘There are many.’

Other elements may also appear in this position (which does not change them into adverbs), including verbs, and nouns (especially quantity nouns and iconic nouns) and adjectives: *omoikitte* 思い切って, *yorokonde* 喜んで, *me o nusunde* 目を盗んで, *kirei ni* きれいに, *kanashisō ni* 悲しそうに, *perapera* ぺらぺら, *futatsu* 二つ, *sammai* 三枚.

Kirei ni hiketa. きれいに引けた。‘[He] played [the piano] very well.’

Yoku dekita. よくできました。‘Well done!’

Kimochiwarusō ni nagamete ita. 気持ち悪そうに眺めていた。‘[He] looked [at me] in a disgusting manner.’

Perapera shabette ita. ぺらぺらしゃべっていた。‘[He] spoke fluently.’

Futatsu arimashita. 二つありました。‘There were two.’

Sammai katte kita. 三枚買ってきた。‘[I] bought three [sheets].’

MODAL POSITION

The modal position is usually the first position in the temporal organization pattern of a sentence or a phrase. The element in this position tends to

modify the whole phrase, not single elements (even when the phrase consists of a single element). This may apply to modal meanings, but may also include the temporal marking of phrases and sentences. As such, the position functions as a sentence modifier position. Auxiliary nouns (especially of a temporal character) and temporal derivatives of verbs may appear in this position.

Ashita itte miyō. 明日行ってみよう。‘Let us try and go tomorrow.’

Hatashite seikō suru ka. 果たして成功するか。‘Is [he] really going to make it?’

Itsumo monku’o iu. いつも文句を言う。‘[They] always complain.

Kesshite iu koto kikanai. 決して言うこと聞かない。‘[He] never listens.’

Hotondo hitoga inai. ほとんど人がいない。‘Practically no one is [there].’

Moshi nakereba, dō shiyō. もしなければ、どうしよう。‘What if there is none?’

Mukashi otokoga ita. 昔男がいた。‘There was a man long time ago.’

(Instead of) Conclusions

Parts of speech are lexical classes of objects with various SEMANTIC, MORPHOLOGICAL and SYNTACTIC properties. Some methodological order in the classification, as in any other act of classification, has to be preserved. The general order of investigation (according to rising level of complexity of respective properties) may be:

PHONETICS→PHONOLOGY→MORPHOLOGY (if applicable)→
SEMANTICS →SYNTAX→PRAGMATICS

It is the author’s strong conviction that the regular, systematic phenomena, SEMANTIC, MORPHOLOGICAL or SYNTACTIC, whenever present and observable, should possibly be preferred and made apparent in an effective grammatical description. This attitude to the grammatical description should also be related to the above-mentioned usefulness of the described concepts for the final users of classification.

As a rule, whenever possible, irregularities should be recognized and described on the basis of regularities. It is for the same reason why the minimalist approach presented in this paper was chosen: it reveals more emphasis on regularities than on irregularities. Last but not least, it is

undoubtedly the regularities that make it possible to compare the Japanese parts of speech with those of other languages. And it is the regularities in the linguistic material that make the grammatical description of the language (including also the description of irregularities, which, as is tacitly implied also on the basis of the above-proposed basic classification, should naturally follow the description of regularities) possible.

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Japanese Ideophones – towards a Systematic Phono-Semantic Description

ABSTRACT

Ideophones are not unique to Japanese, nor typologically uncommon, but, since largely absent from Europe-centered languages, they pose a number of questions to linguists traditionally not accustomed to (or simply oblivious of) them. The paper briefly outlines the definition and characteristics of ideophones in Japanese, including their internal typology and difference from onomatopoeia. However more important point to be made was whether this group of words can be described in terms of correlation between their phonological structure and meaning. Some regularities seem to exist, and attempts to outline these regularities have been made. This, in turn, brings up the age-old discussion of arbitrariness of language signs.

KEYWORDS: ideophones, mimetics, sound symbolism, *giongo*, *gitaigo*, onomatopoeia, *l'arbitraire du signe*, phono-semantics.

0. Introduction

One of the most striking typological characteristics of the Japanese language is the abundant presence of ideophones, i.e. lexemes in the like of *pera-pera*, *chanto*, or *yukkuri*, which appear in various kinds of texts, both spoken and written, but are particularly numerous in the colloquial, informal variant of Japanese. This lexical stratum appears to be particularly difficult to describe, compared to other strata or lexical groups. The key difficulties include the:

- i. precise semantic definition of each lexeme;
- ii. degree of adherence to particular speech registers, also functional limitations thereof;
- iii. classification of ideophones as speech parts, their role in syntax;
- iv. precise definition of the relationship between the form (phonological structure) and content (meaning).

This paper aims to outline the last problem. My objective is to try to address the question whether a regular description of the semantic structure of this lexical group in the Japanese language based entirely on its phonological structure is possible. It appears that there are certain constant

regularities between the phonological structure of ideophones and their meaning.

The basic assumption is that the exact phono-semantic description (i.e. description of the phonetic-semantic regularities) would enable us to foresee the meaning of a given lexical item, and, conversely, to devise a lexical item that conveys given meanings. It appears, however, that such a presumption is possible only to a certain extent, as the exact semantic definition seems to be unlikely, even with the most enthusiastic attitude to the validity of phono-semantic analysis. The degree of such certainty remains yet to be theoretically ascertained. Another theoretical value of phono-semantics would be the possibility to gain insight into the mechanisms of sound imaging (i.e. mapping MEANING → SOUND, thus SUBSTANCE → FORM) among native speakers of the Japanese language.

Such a study, conducted in a broader scale, and based on various languages, would possibly enrich our understanding of how human language works. It could also provide a basis to build hypotheses on the origin of language as we know it.

1. Typology

The presence of ideophonic vocabulary has been discovered to exist in a great many of the world's languages (perhaps we could even venture upon a universalist hypothesis that has 'all' instead of 'many' in the previous sentence), yet the reasons behind their hugely disproportionate role across the world's languages remain unknown. We can only state that there are certain linguistic areas where languages make extensive use of this kind of linguistic devices on a much wider scale than elsewhere. These areas include e.g. Central Africa, Southeast Asia, and East Asia (here especially the Japanese and Korean languages).

The abundance of ideophones in certain linguistic areas seems to be governed by mechanisms of linguistic osmosis, similar to a Sprachbund – they often appear in neighbouring, yet unrelated languages, thus their relevance in a certain system may be attributed to linguistic convergence, not a genetic relationship. Similarly to other rare typological phenomena, the extensive use of ideophones has an insular character on the language map of the world.

Despite the common occurrence of ideophones in many world languages, they differ not only with their scope (in some languages they are marginal, in others they are one of the core lexical categories), but also with the language registers they belong to. In such languages as English or Polish, which have a rather modest repertoire of ideophones, lexemes of this kind

belong to rather lower registers: they are markedly colloquial (e.g. Polish *gadu-gadu* ‘small talk’, English *okey-dokey*, *tip-top*, *wishy-washy*), intimate (e.g. Polish *tapu-capu* ‘helter-skelter’, English *goody-goody*), jocular (e.g. Polish *fiksum-dyrdum* ‘crazy’, English *rumpy-pumpy*), childish (e.g. Polish *szuru-buru* ‘to wash’, English *itsy-bitsy*, *teenie-weenie*) or even vulgar (e.g. Polish *pierdu-pierdu* ‘to talk gibberish’, English *arty-farty*). Compared to this, Japanese ideophones pertain to a much wider set of registers, most importantly including the neutral one and the written language (however, they seem to be largely absent from the lexicon of the highest registers).

2. Definition and Criteria

The formulation of a concise, yet adequate, unambiguous and language-independent definition of the ideophone proves to be unexpectedly difficult. Clement Doke, who coined the term *ideophone*, is widely quoted to have defined it as follows:

A vivid representation of an idea in sound (...) a word, often onomatopoeic, which describes a predicate, qualificative or adverb in respect to manner, colour, sound, smell, action, state or intensity. (Doke 1935: 118)

This definition is, however, far from being precise. It is hard to have such an ambiguous explanation as *vivid representation* as part of a usable definition. The same applies to being *often onomatopoeic* (the difference between ideophones and onomatopoeia will be discussed later) or *describing a predicate, qualificative or adverb* (it is hardly a feature unique to an ideophone).

Many other definitions, which in turn focus on particular languages or language groups, try to define them as a specific group of speech parts or at least a lexical class.

It seems that a proper definition cannot avoid attempts to describe this group as seen from various levels of language structure. I would not attempt to formulate a general definition, but let us turn our attention to the different properties of ideophones in the Japanese language.

The most salient criterion seems to be **semantics**. From the semantic perspective we may thus define ideophones as marked language signs that reflect impressions and sensory impulses. They are further characterized by their additional emotive and perlocutory value (i.e. the sender has the intention to make the receiver feel particularly engaged emotionally in the

content and context of the given message; much more than would be the case without using such linguistic means). Their validity in the information structure of the message seems to be based on redundancy — an ideophone is more frequently a carrier of an additional emotional/perlocutory charge than a vital part in the information wireframe.

In other words, it is quite often the case that ideophones can be left out of a sentence without making it nonsensical, even without losing vital parts of the message. Using ideophones, thus, performs a phatic role — they help to build an emotional liaison between the sender and the receiver, they also convey the speakers' will to maintain and add depth of emotion to communication. Such is, tentatively, their function on a **pragmatic** plan.

The criterion of **morphology** appears to be important as well, as far as the Japanese language is concerned. It also proves to be quite useful to sort out ideophones as a clearly separate category of the lexicon. Japanese ideophones are characterized by their remarkably strict adherence to three separate patterns of phono-morphological structure, to which the overwhelming majority of Japanese ideophones belong. They may be outlined as follows (Latin letters A and B stand for separate morae, constant parts are written using Japanese syllabary *hiragana*):

	PATTERN	EXAMPLES ¹	
i.	AB AB	にこにこ <i>niko-niko</i>	どきどき <i>doki-doki</i>
ii.	A っ B り	にっこり <i>nikkori</i>	どっきり <i>dokkiri</i>
iii.	AB (っ) と	にこっと <i>nikotto</i>	どきっと <i>dokitto</i>
		'[to/with a] smile'	'irritation, excitement'

The iii. group exhibits the incorporated enumerative particle *to*, which is often geminated.

Ideophones may also be part of compound and derivatives (Saito Hamano 1986: 51).

In the case of Japanese ideophones, **syntax** does not seem to be a vital criterion. They usually serve as a noun modifier or adverbial, modifying verbal or nominal parts of a sentence. Less frequently they also modify adjectives. Sometimes they can also act on their own as independent

¹ I admit that the examples cited here are selected rather subjectively for the table to illustrate without empty spaces all three main structural patterns, retaining basically the same meaning in both vertical columns. This is not supposed to suggest that all the three patterns are equally productive in terms of derivation. Just the opposite: it is quite uncommon that same-meaning lexemes are present in all three structural patterns. However, this is not to mean that these categories are not valid — they are, but in most cases empty spaces will occur in all but one cell.

predicates (with the default auxiliary verb *suru*, cf. *guzu guzu suru* ‘to act indecisively, to be slow, to move slovenly’, *unzari suru* ‘to be fed up with’), or, particularly in informal speech, they can serve as sole predicates, with auxiliary verbs omitted (cf. Saito Hamano 1986: 17-18). However, they do not act as nouns, i.e. as a subject or object. From a syntactic point of view, ideophones show properties typical to other speech parts — usually adverbs, *na*-adjectives and verbs, but never or extremely rarely as nouns².

Japanese ideophones have, nevertheless, specific **phonemic, phonetic, and phonotactic** properties uncommon for other layers of the Japanese lexicon (by which I mean three traditionally recognized lexical strata, defined in genetic terms, i.e. *wago* – native Japanese vocabulary; *kango* – Classical Chinese loanwords, borrowings from other languages, mostly East-Asian, via Classical Chinese subsystem, and Japanese coinages using Chinese morphemes; and *gairaigo* – lexemes borrowed without the intermediary role of the Sino-xenic subsystem in Japanese, usually from European languages, like Portuguese, Dutch and German, but most often English, also native coinages with such morphemes).

The phonetic peculiarity of ideophones has led some authors (cf. e.g. Tsujimura 1996: 147) to identify not three, but four layers of the Japanese lexicon. The fourth one, apart from *wago*, *kango*, and *gairaigo*, being precisely ideophones.³

The criterion of such a classification (i.e. ideophones being on equal status with the other three) must however be different than in the case of the others — from the etymological point of view they are native vocabulary, not borrowed vocabulary.

However, they have certain quite unique phonetic characteristics, different from other layers (especially within the native stock), such as the presence of:

- i. [p] in word-initial position;
- ii. non-geminated [p] in middle (i.e. inter-vocalic) position;
- iii. [a:], which otherwise features only in *gairaigo* words, and within *wago* only rarely: in few family terms and the pronoun *ā* ‘that way’;

² Interestingly, we can observe a striking difference here with the Korean language, which otherwise has a very similar system of ideophones to Japanese. In Korean, nouns are also frequently derived from ideophones (Sohn 2001: 98-101). Note that in Japanese there is a number of onomatopoeia-motivated nouns, as is the case with probably any language.

³ To be precise, we must note that the Classic Japanese subsystem is also sometimes classified as another stratum of Japanese lexicon (cf. Huszcza et al. 2003: 126). It serves as a relic subsystem in contemporary Japanese, e.g. in titles of books, feature films, proverbs, classical citations, certain grammatical constructions etc. Such a subsystem is thus defined not in genetic, but grammatical and syntactic terms. If we were to accept such a classification, the Japanese language would have five different (yet heterogenically defined) subsystems.

- iv. [N] in syllable coda after a long vowel;
- v. geminated consonants after a long vowel.

3. Ideophones and Onomatopoeia: Key Differences

I must at this point make an important distinction between various groups of Japanese vocabulary that imitate external states by means of speech sounds. The following distinction seems to be the most salient: **onomatopoeia** (or *phonomimes*) vs. **ideophones**. The crucial difference between them is based on what such lexemes try to emulate. The former merely imitate human auditory impulses (i.e. audible sounds) of external world, whereas the latter are phonetic expressions of non-auditory emotions and impulses. The difference is therefore also a difference in iconicity. The sound-to-meaning relation in the former group is clearly a naturalistic, mimetic one, while in the case of ideophones this relation is far from being apparent.

We can draw the distinctions further down: onomatopoeia can imitate human voices (we lack a corresponding English term, although there is a precise Japanese term 擬声語 *giseigo*, lit. ‘words that imitate [human] voices’) or other sounds, namely animals, natural phenomena and manmade machines (Japanese term is 擬音語 *giongo*, lit. ‘words that imitate sounds’).

Ideophones, in turn, can be further classified into **psychomimes** (Japanese 擬情語 *gijōgo*, lit. ‘words that imitate emotions’), i.e. lexemes that describe human mental states and impressions, and **phenomimes** (Japanese 擬態語 *gitaigo*, lit. ‘words that imitate states’), which are impressions of other senses than hearing expressed by means of language sounds. An English term adopted sometimes (e.g. Tsujimura 1996: 93) to embrace both ideophones and onomatopoeia is *mimetics*, but elsewhere it is quite often used to mean ideophones only. The nomenclature is still far from being consistent in this subject, to say the least.

The IDEOPHONE : ONOMATOPOEIA distinction is also important from a typological point of view — these two groups appear to have quite different properties in various languages or language areas. While the number of onomatopoeia is rather constant across languages, their function within corresponding systems (they belong to similar registers and sociolects, and even have similar sound structure) is also similar. Ideophones differ not only in number and function in different languages, but also their position within a given language, sound structure and morphology.

Ideophones are also interesting from another point of view: by analyzing cognitive mechanisms involved in their usage and functioning, we encounter numerous questions that still remain to be answered, and some hypotheses contradict traditional paradigms when reflecting about language.

The common characteristics of both groups seem to be the provenience of the lexemes. These language units differ from every other lexicon item in one important point: while every lexeme of every natural language is determined to come from certain previously existing entities (their own proto-language or a certain source-language), ideophones and onomatopoeia seem to be rooted in simply imitating the external world by means of speech sounds. We may thus dub this provenience “extra-linguistic”, “naturalistic”, or even “un-etymological”.

An important reservation must be made here. In contemporary Japanese there is a substantial group of ideophones that seem to be connected in a certain way (because I would hesitate to refer to them decidedly as to “be derived from”, as the direction of word-formation is not entirely certain) with lexemes in other groups, primarily native *wago* words (cf. Saito Hamano 1986: 6; 52-), e.g.:

IDEOPHONE	MEANING
<i>kira-kira</i>	‘glitter, sparkle’
<i>koro-koro</i>	‘rolling’
<i>guru-guru</i>	‘[going around] in circles’
<i>hissori</i>	‘quiet, still, silent’
<i>tera-tera</i>	‘gleamingly’
<i>nuru-nuru</i>	‘slimy, slippery’

may be
associated
with

LEXEME	MEANING
明らか <i>akiraka</i>	‘clear, plain’
転がす <i>korogasu</i>	‘to roll’
車 <i>kuruma</i>	‘car; wheel’
密か <i>hisoka</i>	‘secret, private’
照らす <i>terasu</i>	‘to shine’
濡れる <i>nureru</i>	‘to get wet’

4. Terminology

The systematic comparative and typological research of ideophones is relatively advanced in Bantu and Southern Semitic linguistics. These are the language areas that are comparatively rich in such phenomena, often being vital parts of the language systems used there. Linguistic terminology is therefore somewhat rooted in works concerning African linguistics. Otherwise, we must admit that it is rather far from being clear and unanimously accepted.

As for the general term for ideophones, various coinages have been proposed. These include *phon(a)esthemes* (John Rupert Firth, 1930), *impressives* (Maurice Durand, 1961), *descriptives* (Neil Smith, 1973), *expressives* (Gérard Diffloth, 1976), or *phonosemics* (Roger W. Wescott, 1980). Diego Collado, the Spanish author of an early Japanese grammar,

Ars grammaticae Iaponicae linguae, published in 1632, has called them *adverbia sonus*, literally ‘adverbs of sound’. In French there is a term *mimologique*. In the English language, except for *ideophones*, also *sound symbolism*, *sound iconisms*, *phonetic symbolism*, and *mimetic words* are frequently found.

The Japanese-language terms (introduced above) are relatively stable and precise. They are commonly used not only in scientific texts, but also in numerous how-to books and dictionaries targeted at a general audience.

I have settled upon *ideophones* for two reasons, as this term is:

- i. relatively widely accepted in English-language texts
- ii. surprisingly precise, aggregating the key dualism of two aspects of this group, namely the unique fusion of content (Greek *ἰδέα*, *idea*) and sound substance (Greek *φωνή*, *phone*)

Despite various terms, we must stress the importance of differentiating onomatopoeia from ideophones, as they are fundamentally different language phenomena. Such a distinction is seldom made in the practical description of the Japanese language (most often, for teaching purposes) and in practical usage during Japanese classes. They are all commonly called *onomatopoeia* in English. At least, this is the case of Japanese language teaching in Poland. Such confusion can be seen as a hindrance to the proper understanding of such an interesting phenomenon as the ideophone.

5. Discussions Surrounding the Arbitrariness of Language Signs

Linguists seem to be interested in ideophones in quite a disproportionate way to the role played by this lexical group. This is the point in the human language that seems to show regular bonds between the substance of content and form of expression (in Hjelmslev’s terms), thus being not entirely arbitrary language signs. Such arbitrariness has been the cornerstone of modern thought about language and linguistics, especially in its structuralist canon, as first outlined by Ferdinand de Saussure (who introduced the well-known rule of *l’arbitraire du signe*).

Since Ancient Greek philosophy, there have been two different approaches to how language signs are motivated. They are concisely outlined in Plato’s dialogue *Cratylus*. The “**naturalist**” approach (also known as the *φύσει* theory, lit. ‘by nature’) claimed that any name existing in a language was the most suitable label for any objects it denoted. Their phonetic structure is not accidental and there is a phonetic regularity to the very nature of the

object. Note that this approach must inevitably have taken for granted the inequality of different languages. This is hardly surprising — the Ancient Greeks viewed their language as being “civilized”, whilst other languages were considered much less civilized, even uncivilized, and therefore *barbaric*.⁴ If that was not the case, it would have been impossible to explain the different sound structures in semantic equivalents in other languages. Although Ancient Greek naturalists are sometimes quoted to have uttered such generalized statements as “both in Greek and any other language”, they failed to explain this obvious contradiction.

Naturalists were opposed by what are today called “**conventionalists**”. They held all names to be purely conventional, arbitrary and devised in an essentially random and consensual way (this approach is also known as the νόμος theory, lit. ‘by law’, or θέσει theory, lit. ‘by assumption’).

Modern linguists have generally rejected the former approach, maintaining the tenacious claim of the arbitrariness of language signs. There is hardly a contemporary scientist who believes that the nature of all objects has a direct influence on how their names sound.

The above-mentioned rule of sign arbitrariness usually accepts a few minor exceptions, e.g. pure onomatopoeia and close family terms. The latter are usually coined using the first words uttered by a baby in its life, thus having a simple phonological structure — they contain the easiest to pronounce speech sounds in a given language, which are acquired first in the lives of its native speakers. Most often these include labials like [m] or [b] and open vowels like [a]⁵. Syllables are very often reduplicated (repeating the same syllables is typical at the babbling stage in human evolution). Thus, the coincidental similarities between unrelated languages may emerge.

There were, however, natural scientists and thinkers who — just like Ancient Greek naturalists — did not deny some sort of connection between the phonetic structure of the word and its meaning. Even if we ignore fancy hypotheses verging between poetics, aesthetics, philosophy, and mysticism, such as Mikhail Lomonosov’s poorly argued idea that “mEEK” phenomena and objects often have [e], [i], and [‘u] vowels and “frightening” ones have [o], [u], and [i] vowels, such a correspondence has also been noted by Wilhelm von Humboldt (1836). He claimed that language tended to choose

⁴ Etymologically, itself an onomatopoeia *bar-bar* being the imitation of incomprehensible foreign speech – *to babble*.

⁵ Cf. the similarity between the Polish lexeme *baba* and Japanese lexeme 婆 *baba*, both meaning ‘old woman’. Polish and Japanese are not related (as far as the present state of science is concerned), these particular lexemes are not mutually connected either (e.g. not being loanwords from either side or from a third party).

phonetic structures that make the same impression to the ear as the very object does. The formula “impression similar to the object” is the key concept for further, now psycholinguistic, research in the field.

Otto Jespersen, too, was deeply convinced that the arbitrariness rule is not absolute:

*Sound symbolism, we may say, makes some words **more fit to survive** and gives them considerable help in their struggle for existence. (...) There is no denying that there are words which we feel instinctively to be adequate to express the ideas they stand for.* (Jespersen 1922: 408; bolding mine – BTW)

After the Second World War, many linguists undertook research in phono-semantics in natural languages, not limited to ideophones. They established, for instance, that the same sound groups appear in many etymologically unrelated, yet semantically somewhat proximate lexemes. Examples include English word groups such as *crick, cramp, crack, crunch, scrunch, crash, crumple, crease, cram*, which have a common semantic element ‘to modify shape forcedly’. Such words as *fire, flame, flare, flash, flicker* have the common element of ‘flickering light’. Words as *throw, thrust, thrash, thresh, thwack, thwart, thump* have the common element of ‘thumping sound’. Lexemes like *slack, slouch, slosh, sloppy, slug, sluggard, sloth, slattern, slow, sleepy, slovenly* seem to contain somewhat negative connotations with the impression of being too slow and/or untidy.

Studies such as these were conducted by such distinguished linguists as Leonard Bloomfield (1933) and John Rupert Firth (1964). The latter, however, was fiercely opposed to attributing any semantic value to the phonetic structure.

6. Ideophones — Cognitive Mechanisms

To explain the phenomenon of grouping some lexemes with a similar sound profile and semantic element, a mechanism called **clustering** has been proposed (Margaret Magnus). It works the following way: the sound structure of the basic (prototypic) lexeme for a given semantic category determines in some way the sound structure of lexemes less prototypic and peripheral. It seems to be a factor to explain why some words stick in a language for good, whilst some disappear over time. Those which stick seem to be perceived by native speakers as being “more explicit”, “graphic”, or “picturesque”, and somehow “better meaning” than others. Details of sound structures are language-dependent, but they do show certain similarities within a given language group or subgroup.

Another psycho-linguistic mechanism that is sometimes considered to be responsible for observed form-content regularities, is **synaesthesia**. This means that an impulse of one human sense is perceived as an impulse of another. This term is sometimes used in clinical psychiatry, where it applies to patients who perceive e.g. colours as sounds or sounds as tastes. Synaesthesia, though, as understood as the metaphorization sensual impulses between various human senses, is actually a commonplace process in natural languages – many impulses are conceptualized as other sensory impulses. In many languages (or perhaps all) the following expressions are very common and natural:

EXAMPLE

*loud shirt**bitter wind**sweet melody**sharp reek*

COGNITIVE PATHWAY

sight/touch → hearing

feel → taste

hearing → taste

smell → touch

Another mechanism that may be held responsible for the given results is the **motoric theory of speech**. This theory is developed within the framework of the psycho-physiology of speech, and is based on relations of cognitive impulses with speech organs. Human speech organs are directly proximate to the central nervous system, located in the human head, thus there may be a certain neuro-psychological connection between sensory impulses and thought impulses and the impressions felt while generating speech sounds.

Explanations of this kind are as follows. To give a simple example, closed vowels generated with narrowed speech organs (e.g. [i]) are associated with something small, and open ones (e.g. [a]), that have open mouth, are associated with bigger objects.

The cognitive co-relation between speech sounds and size may be dead simple: one has to open the mouth wider to gulp bigger pieces of food than smaller ones. Tentatively speaking, were humans to produce speech with a different body organ than the same one to consume food, this phenomenon would not have emerged.

Researchers have long tried to establish concrete links between phonetics and semantics. Research studies were typically conducted with the participation of a test group of people with no acquaintance of a tested language, in which pairs of semantically contrasting adjectives (e.g. *big-small*, *cold-warm*) were chosen. The subjects were to pick the correct meaning (i.e. which of the two means ‘big’ etc.). There were numerous

research studies of this kind (examples see Allott 1995: 7–9), and the languages tested included Japanese, Polish, Hungarian, Croatian, Hindi, Hebrew etc. The researchers generally claim that the obtained results exceeded the predicted random outcome, thus they have proved the existence of non-arbitrary phono-semantics. The methodology of these research studies was often criticized, though, with the critics claiming that the researcher can subconsciously influence the tested subjects. Moreover, not all the language pairs (i.e. the tested language and native language of the subjects) showed a similar correlation of concordance.

Another kind of experiment was the often cited research by Edward Sapir, conducted in 1929. The researcher posed the following question to the tested subjects: “imagine two tables, a large one and a small one. In a certain language there are two words for them, one is *mal*, the other being *mil*. Which one means ‘large table’, and which one ‘small table’?” The results differed in different test groups, but ca. 80% pointed to *mal* as meaning ‘large’, and *mil* being definitely smaller one. Other experiments, however (cf. Newman (1933), cited by Allott (1995); Newman was a student of Sapir’s), did not seem to confirm Sapir’s results. Newman tested the sound structure of ca. 500 English words related to size.

Psychologists and psycho-linguists also conducted another kind of interesting experiment. They showed subjects abstract shapes and colours, asking them to devise a fitting expression (or choose from given ones), or attribute a word to a sound they heard. Such experiments were conducted as early as in the 1920s (Usnadze, Kohler, Wissemann). A well-known researcher in this field is Vilayanur Ramachandran, who coined the term “buba-kiki effect”. He showed subjects two shapes: one with clear-cut edges and sharp, pointed ends, the other one – smooth, with oblong curves. He then asked to attribute abstract sound sequences of *buba* and *kiki* to both. Subjects came from different language backgrounds, but the results were quite consistent: ca. 95-98% of tested persons said *kiki* better suits the sharp-edged figure. These results were observed not only with adult subjects — children reacted in a similar way, but less conspicuously (only ca. 83%).

The same experiment has also been carried out several times during the present author’s lectures. The results also appear to corroborate Ramachandran’s findings. The overwhelming majority (well above 90%) chose *kiki* to mean a sharp-edged figure.⁶

⁶ In my presentations the figures were additionally coloured. The sharp figure was red. Red is commonly thought to be associated with blood, fresh meat, aggression, prominent sexuality and sharpness. The smooth shape was green, the colour generally considered to be associated with

Another explanation of ideophone regularities is offered by **evolutional biology**. Research by Morton (cited by Ohala 1997: 2) focused on sounds uttered by animals of 56 species (birds and mammals) during a face-to-face fight scene or when in danger (so called “agonistic vocalizations”). The research showed that the individual who tried to attack or threaten an opponent emitted a low-pitched sound, whilst the submissive individual (who tried to surrender and escape the fight) was prone to produce a high-pitched vocalization. The proposed explanation is as follows. During a fight the sizes of opposing individuals are all-important, thus the competitors try to present themselves as larger than they actually are, to impress the opponent. Such behaviour is well attested and commonly known, and also includes the raising of feathers and hair, ears, wings, tails and spines. Threatening behaviour that manages to convince the opponent that the attacking party is larger, more mature and powerful, allows fighting to be avoided, which is objectively beneficial to both (they simply avoid physical harm). This is probably the reason behind the wide repertoire of such behaviours.

A larger individual is naturally prone to emit a voice of lower pitch, thus lowering one’s voice leads to being associated with a larger size. Pitch is in turn related to the frequencies of vocalization resonance. As John Ohala points out,

[t]he characteristic frequencies of the vocal tract resonances are roughly inversely correlated with the length of the vocal tract which, in turn, is correlated with the linear dimensions of the vocalizer. So acoustically high resonances should convey an impression of a small vocalizer and low resonances, of a larger vocalizer (Ohala 1997: 3).

Such an interpretation may explain research findings, both experimental and data-based, which suggest a correlation between certain vowels in words describing size in various non-related languages.

7. Is precise Phono-Semantic Description Possible?

Numerous research studies seem to confirm that there is certain kind of relation between sound structure and meaning. As mentioned earlier, there is strong evidence to prove such a relation within one language, but there are also credible premises that a similar relation may exist across different languages.

nature, non-aggressiveness, pleasant and calm things. The tested subjects were predominantly Polish speakers.

Both assumptions, although far from being established theoretic postulates, are quite tempting to formulate a solid pattern of relations between sound structure and meaning. Such temptation is particularly strong when only one language is involved, as its native speakers instinctively feel the semantic nuances between similar lexemes, all the more so in the case of ideophones.

One example of an attempt to describe such (proposed) regularities is a description published in a very useful and popular grammar of Japanese language (Makino, Tsutsui 1995: 50-56). The authors include the following regularities⁷:

- (A) voiced consonants represent something big, heavy, dull or dirty; voiceless consonants — something small, light, sharp or pretty, e.g.
- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <i>koro-koro to korogaru</i> | ‘[small object] rolls’ |
| <i>goro-goro to korogaru</i> | ‘[heavy object] rolls’ |
| <i>pota-pota to ochiru</i> | ‘[small amount of liquid] drips’ |
| <i>bota-bota to ochiru</i> | ‘[large amount of liquid] drips’ |
- (B) velar consonants ([k] and [g]) tend to represent hardness, sharpness, clear-cuttedness, separation, detachment or sudden change, e.g.
- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| <i>kukkiri to mieru</i> | ‘be visible clearly’ |
| <i>garatto kawaru</i> | ‘completely change’ |
| <i>pokkuri to shinu</i> | ‘die suddenly’ |
- (C) a dental fricative consonant ([s]) tends to represent a quiet state or a quiet and quick motion, e.g.
- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>suru-suru to suberu</i> | ‘slide smoothly’ |
| <i>hissori to suru</i> | ‘be quiet’ |
| <i>koso-koso to nigeru</i> | ‘escape secretly’ |
- (D) a liquid consonant [l] tends to represent fluidity, smoothness or slipperiness, e.g.
- | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>sara-sara to nagareru</i> | ‘flow smoothly’ |
| <i>sura-sura to kotaeru</i> | ‘answer with great ease’ |
| <i>tara-tara to nagareru</i> | ‘[sweat or blood] drip continuously’ |
- (E) nasal consonants [m], [n], (and [ɲ]) tend to represent tactuality, warmth and softness, e.g.
- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>muku-muku shite iru</i> | ‘[a dog or a cat] is plump’ |
| <i>nyuru-nyuru shite iru</i> | ‘be slimy’ |
| <i>nechi-nechi shite iru</i> | ‘be sticky’ |
- (H) a back high vowel [u] tends to represent something that has to do with human physiology or psychology, e.g.

⁷ Quotation abridged.

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>usu-usu kanzuku</i> | ‘perceive dimly’ |
| <i>uzu-uzu suru</i> | ‘itch for action’ |
| <i>ukkari suru</i> | ‘be off guard’ |
- (I) a back vowel [ɔ] tends to represent something basically negative with regard to human psychology, e.g.
- | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>ozu-ozu shite iru</i> | ‘be nervous and timid’ |
| <i>ota-ota suru</i> | ‘don’t know what to do’ |
| <i>ome-ome to damasareru</i> | ‘be deceived in a shameless manner’ |
- (J) a front vowel [ɛ] tends to represent something vulgar, e.g.
- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| <i>hebereke</i> | ‘become dead drunk’ |
| <i>hera-hera to warau</i> | ‘laugh meaninglessly when embarrassed’ |

Such a description seems to be quite arbitrary, though. Chosen examples may also look suspicious to many readers — one can easily find counter-examples to them. Another problem is that in the Japanese language, which has no more than five distinct vowel phonemes (if we exclude five long vowels), attributing precise, highly specialized semantic value to respective vowels can hardly be credible. Moreover, some vowels are described in a stunningly general manner — cf. (H), where “something that has to do with human physiology or psychology” could describe most other ideophonic lexemes as well.

This description is also obviously noncomprehensive — it does not provide any clues to determine the meaning (even in a most general way) of any given lexeme, it does not allow an ideophone of intended meaning to be generated.

Similar descriptions have also been proposed for the Korean language as well (Sohn 2001: 96–101).

A much more comprehensive and better argued phono-semantic analysis is offered in Saito Hamano 1986 (77-227). The author, providing abundant examples, draws concrete conclusions as to the generalized semantic value of respective parts of e.g. bisyllabic mimetic adverbs (224-225):

The voicing feature of initial consonants of bisyllabic mimetic adverbs concerns the weight/mass of objects. In addition, initial consonants of bisyllabic mimetic roots describe the tactile nature of objects. This semantic dimension closely parallels the physical properties of the organs that are involved in the production of initial consonants themselves. These two semantic dimensions are summarized in the following.

/p/=breakable tense surfaces

/b/=breakable tense surfaces

/t/=lack of surface tension, subduedness

light/small/fine

heavy/large/coarse

light/small/fine

<i>/d/=lack of surface tension, subduedness</i>	<i>heavy/large/coarse</i>
<i>/k/=hard surface</i>	<i>light/small/fine</i>
<i>/g/=hard surface</i>	<i>heavy/large/coarse</i>
(...)	
<i>Initial vowels generally control the semantic dimension of the shape of the first object or movement. The vowel /e/ is an exception.</i>	
<i>/i: line</i>	
<i>/e/: inappropriateness</i>	
<i>/a/: flat plane</i>	
<i>/o/: roundish object</i>	
<i>/u/: protrusion</i>	
(...)	

Such an analysis could lead to a conclusion that asserts the near-complete predictability of a given mimetic lexeme. Even if such findings are not entirely accurate, this proves that the formulation of a kind of regularized phono-semantic paradigm is possible to a degree.

8. Conclusions

A contemporary researcher of phono-semantic phenomena Margaret Magnus believes that both extreme stances (i.e. naturalists' and conventionalists') are over-generalizations. She argues that extreme naturalists' claim about phonetic structure determining reference is wrong, though conventionalists' claim about semantics of a lexeme that can be completely reduced to word reference appears to be equally wrong (MAGNUS 2001: 2) and that there is absolutely no relationship between sound structure and meaning.

Experimental research studies have provided much credible evidence that language signs are not completely arbitrary; that **certain aspects** of semantics can be encoded in its sound structure (yet not the referent, as Magnus points out). This is true particularly in certain subsets of vocabulary. The word group in which this non-arbitrariness is particularly visible, are ideophones.

Such a corollary gives rise to more questions than it offers answers. There are still crucial questions remaining to be answered, such as:

- i. is the systematic description of phono-semantic relations possible, in the way Makino & Tsutsui and Saito Hamano have tried to do in the examples above;
- ii. if so, is such a description possible cross-linguistically (i.e. common for a human as an animal that uses language), or only within one language system;

- iii. are different layers of vocabulary phono-semantic in various degrees; one can theoretically preview that more specific terms might have closer phono-semantic ties, but this assumption remains yet to be proved or disproved;
- iv. are only onomatopoeia and ideophones phono-semantic, thus making them “naturalistic stratum” in a natural language; to what extent are other layers (e.g. words relative to size, shape, sound and colour) phono-semantic; which makes other vocabulary layers purely conventionalist.

It seems that further studies in the field may prove to be quite fruitful to our understanding of language as a phenomenon. Also important is their validity to understand the cognitive processes that shape vocabulary in a specific language, in this case — Japanese. It seems though, judging from the present state of studies in the field, that the practical importance for the semantic description of the Japanese language is much less advanced than data that provide more general statements.

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