

The Structure of Japanese Phrase in Accordance with Speaking Modes

Toshiyuki Sadanobu

Graduate School of Intercultural Studies, Kobe University

sadanobu@kobe-u.ac.jp

Abstract

While English is often spoken in an increment of clause (i.e. subject and predicate), Japanese of a smaller phrase called “bunsetsu” (e.g. noun phrase and case particle). Previous studies on Japanese language, however, have traditionally been focusing on clause structure, and little attention has been paid on the structure of “bunsetsu” (non-predicate one, especially). This paper describes the basic structure of non-predicate “bunsetsu” from grammatical point of view, and elucidates that the structure of non-predicate “bunsetsu” varies in accordance with four speaking modes ((i) Sentence mode A; (ii) Sentence mode B; (iii) “Bunsetsu” mode; and (iv) Character mode), which are identified on the criteria of compatibility among seven phenomena attested in Japanese speech. To be more concrete, this paper shows that it is only the mode (iii) that enables copula, “bunsetsu”-final particle (“Kantoujoshi” in Japanese), final leaping, and combination of breaking and prolongation in non-predicate “bunsetsu”).

Index Terms: intonation unit, speaking mode, Japanese

1. Introduction

While English speech often employs the clause (subject + predicate) as a unit, ([1][2]), Japanese speech often employs the phrase (“bunsetsu”) as a unit ([3][4][5]). However, Japanese language studies through now have concentrated on structural analysis of the sentence, with few exceptions ([5][6]) almost never looking at the structure of the phrase (particularly the non-predicate phrase). By focusing on the relation between phenomena, this paper groups speech modes (speech consciousness) into four main types ((i) sentence mode a, (ii) sentence mode b, (iii) phrase mode, (iv) character mode), and shows that the structure of a non-predicate phrase varies by speaking modes.

Section 2 will introduce the phenomena discussed in this paper. Section 3 will show how they can be grouped into four categories connected with four speaking modes ((i) Sentence mode A; (ii) Sentence mode B; (iii) Bunsetsu mode; and (iv) Character mode) based on the relation between these phenomena, and describe that the structure of non-predicate phrase can be complex only on Bunsetsu mode. Lastly, Section 4 will summarize this paper’s findings.

2. Seven phenomena

This paper observes seven types of phenomena in total. A brief introduction to each is provided below

2.1. Disappearance of lexical accent (DA)

While traditionally it has been thought that in Japanese intonation does not break down the form of lexical accent ([7]), in actual everyday communication it is not

uncommon for intonation alone to be reflected in tone, with lexical accent drowned out ([8]).

For example, in the database of conversations between a mother and her child commonly known as “Emi-chan Data,” ([9]), the entire sentence of the joking threat “Emi no otete tabechau zoo” (“I’m going to eat your hand!”) is spoken in a gently rising tone, ignoring lexical accent on all words and phrases (no. 14, side B, approx. 49: 32).

In this paper, we will call this phenomenon in which tone reflects only one intonation and lexical accent is not reflected “disappearance of lexical accent” (DA).

2.2. Preposed predicate phrase (PPP)

As seen in the example “Chan to kare ni itta yo” (“I already told him”), in a Japanese sentence the predicate phrase (in this example, “itta yo”) is positioned at the very end. However, this order of occurrence of phrases is not strictly unchanging, and in some cases the predicate phrase may appear in a position more to the front of the sentence, as in “Itta yo, chan to kare ni.” Furthermore, in some cases the predicate phrase may appear in positions other than the end of the sentence with modifiers, as in “Chan to itta yo, kare ni” or “Kare ni itta yo, chan to.” In this paper, we will call this phenomenon, including all of these cases, “preposed predicate phrase” (PPP).

This paper will not pursue the issue of whether the predicate phrase actively is placed in the front in all cases referred to as PPP or whether some cases should properly be described as “rear placement” (late appearance) of other phrases. Instead, it will refer to every such case uniformly as PPP.

2.3. Occurrence of copula (OC)

In the example “Nihon no shuto wa Tokyo da” (“The capital of Japan is Tokyo”), the copula (in this example, “da”) occurs at the end of the predicate phrase. Traditionally, the copula has been known to appear at the end of other phrases as well ([7]). As one specific example, in “Shikamo da” (“And that too”) the copula (in this example, “da”) occurs at the end of the adverbial phrase “shikamo,” which is not a predicate phrase.

As used in this paper, “occurrence of copula” (hereafter OC) will refer only to cases in which a copula occurs at the end of a phrase other than a predicate phrase. It will not include cases when a copula occurs at the end of a predicate phrase.

Besides “da”, there is another copula “desu”, which often appears at the end of non-predicate phrase as well as “da”. Moreover, it is possible to combine these two copulas through the past particle “ta” to construct a complex form “datta-desu.”

Aside from “da” and “desu,” other copula widely seen to occur at the end of non-predicate phrases include “ja,” as well as “ssu,” “zamasu,” “degozaru” and “deojaru” etc. As

well as in predicate phrases, form of copula in non-predicate phrases varies in accordance with the speaker's types ([8][9]). For example, a speaker of "old man" type utters "ja" instead of "da", and "desu-ja" instead of "desu". And instead of "desu", athletic speaker utters "ssu", upper-class matron speaker utters "zamasu", samurai/ninja utters "degozaru", and Heian noble man utters "deojaru."

2.4. Occurrence of interjectory particle (OI)

Some final particles appearing at the end of a predicate phrase (i.e., those other than particles such as "zo," "ze," or "wa") traditionally are known also to appear at the end of phrases other than predicate phrases, as interjectory particles ([7]). While some advocate eliminating the distinction between final particles and interjectory particles ([10]), in this paper we will maintain the distinction between the two, referring to the phenomenon of an interjectory particle ("ne" in the following examples) appearing at the end of a phrase other than a predicate phrase ("shikamo") as in the example "Shikamo ne" as "occurrence of interjectory particle" (hereafter OI).

In addition to "ne," widely seen interjectory particles likely to occur in this way include "na," "yo," and "sa," as well as "no(o)" as spoken by elderly people and "nya(a)" as spoken by "cat-like" people.

In some cases both a copula and an interjectory particle may appear together at the end of a non-predicate phrase. In such a case, as seen in the example "shikamo da ne" the copula ("da" in this example) is positioned first, with the interjectory particle ("ne" in this example) coming later.

2.5. Final leaping of intonation (FLI)

The phenomenon in which, for example, the phrase "kare ga," generally pronounced with a High-Low-Low tone (hereafter HLL), is instead pronounced with a HLH or the phrase "sore ga," generally pronounced with a LHH tone is instead pronounced with a LH-Ultra High, pronouncing the final component (in these examples, "ga") with a higher intonation as if it is leaping from the phrase, including cases in which this is followed by a return to a lower intonation ("kare ga(a) [HLHL], "sore ga(a)" [LH-Ultra High-L]), has been known for some time and is referred to by various names. In this paper we will refer to it simply as "final leaping of intonation" (FLI), separating this into "returned final leaping of intonation" (returned FLI) and "unreturned final leaping of intonation" (unreturned FLI) as necessary.

While returned FLI has a negative image as childish, unintelligent way of speaking among young people, in fact this intonation is observed broadly in the speech of young and old, male and female, with the exception of some high-ranking characters. Unless repeated frequently and consecutively, this intonation does not actually give such a bad impression.

Although it is difficult for a predicate phrase or final phrase to appear in the case of a returned FLI, this is merely a general tendency. In strong expressions such as "Hara ga tatsuu!" ("It makes me angry!"), "Koitsu!" ("You!"), "Mo, otosan-ttaraa!" ("Oh, you, father!"), "Itsumo so nan da karaa!" ("It's always that way!"), "Wakatta yoo!" ("I get it!"), or "Kaeshite yoo!" ("Give it back!"), returned final leaping intonation may occur with a predicate phrase or final phrase ([12]).

2.6. Combination of breaking and prolongation (CBP)

Japanese permits various types of halting of speech. For example when saying the title "Dokurokamen" hesitatingly in a form such as "Saikin terebi de hayatteru anime arimasu yo ne. Eeto, _____ deshita-kke" ("There's a popular animated series on TV lately. What's it called, _____?"), it would be natural to say "Do, Dokurokamen" (breaking off and then repeating from the start), "Do, kurokamen" (breaking off and then continuing), "DooDokurokamen" (extending the first sound and then repeating from the start), or "Dookuro kamen" (extending and then continuing). At the same time, a certain connection can be seen between halting and feeling (i.e., hesitation or surprise), as in the way the only halting used to express surprise is "Do-, Dokuro Kamen" (breaking off and then repeating from the start) ([6]).

As used here, "combination of breaking and prolongation" (hereafter CBP) refers to a complex kind of halting in which, as in the examples "koozookaikaku, uuno" ("structural reforms" in genitive case) or "koozookaikakuo, oo," ("structural reform" in accusative case) after once halting pronunciation at the end of a word ("koozookaikaku") or phrase ("koozookaikakuo") ("koozookaikaku," "kozookaikakuo,") the final vowel sound ("u" or "o") is extended. This type of halting is used in official situations by adult characters who have authority (while taking care to be noncommittal). It is not used by children speakers.

2.7. High pitch accent on first mora (HF)

When, for example, reading the alphabet one letter at a time as it is pronounced in Japanese, every letter is pronounced with a high pitch accent on first mora, from "Ee" ("A") (HL) through "daburuyuu" ("W") (HLLL), "ekkusuu" ("X") (HLLL), "wai" ("Y") (HL), and "zetto" ("Z") (HLL). Similarly, when reading the Kanji characters in the name "Koobe Daigaku" ("Kobe University") one at a time as "koo," "be," "dai," "gaku," again each character is pronounced with a high pitch accent on first mora: "koo" (HL), "be" (H), "dai" (HL), and "gaku" (HL). This phenomenon will be referred to as "high pitch accent on first mora" (hereafter HF). In general, when adding honorifics such as "-san," "-chan," and "-kun" to people's names the pitch of the immediately preceding mora is continued unchanged, as in "Tanaka-san," "Tanaka-chan," or "Tanaka-kun" (LHH-HH) or "Shimizu-san," "Shimizu-chan," or "Shimizu-kun" (HLL-LL). However, in all cases when there is a high pitch accent on the first mora, as in "Ka-san," "Gi-chan," "Go-kun," "Shu-san," "Jo-chan," "So-kun," "Pesan," or "Ra-chan," "-san," "-chan," and "-kun" are pronounced with a low pitch (HLL). Furthermore, when pronouncing a foreign name such as Xiaoming Chang in a way patterned on the tone of its original language (Chinese), such as "Chen Shaomin" (LHHLLH), "-san" appended at the end has a low pitch as well. These cases too are due to the phenomenon of reading with a high pitch accent on the first mora. When saying, for example, "Sada' to iu ji wa ko kakimasu" ("The character 'sada' is written this way") as well, the accent is high on the first mora, and this too is due to the phenomenon of reading with a high pitch accent on the first mora.

3. Relation between these phenomena

Observation of whether the seven types of phenomena introduced above are likely to co-occur shows that while three types of phenomena are unlikely to co-occur with others, four types may co-occur with and affect on each other. That is, three types of phenomena may be considered each to result from peculiar speech modes of the speaker, while four may be considered to result from a common speech mode.

3.1. Peculiarity of DA

Among these seven types of phenomena, DA does not co-occur with the other phenomena. No copula or interjectory particle is added, for example by saying in a gently rising tone without lexical accent something such as “??Emi no o-tete da ne tabechau zoo” (“I’m going to eat your hand!”). (Hereinafter, double question marks “??” at the start of the sentence indicate that the sentence is an unnatural expression.)

3.2. Peculiarity of PPP

The PPP also does not co-occur with the other phenomena. For example, the sentence “Itta yo, chan to kare ni” is not spoken in a gently rising tone without lexical accent or spoken with a copula or interjectory particle added (“??Itta yo, chan to da ne, kare ni saa.”)

3.3. Peculiarity of HF

HF does not co-occur with other phoneme phenomena (i.e., DA or FLI). The possibility of its co-occurrence with non-phoneme phenomena (i.e., PPP, OC, OI, or CBP) relates to the details of what is described as “speakership” [13] in this paper.

If the speaker is an “animator” merely reading something given to him or her, he or she may pronounce each character individually with a high pitch accent on the first mora—that is, HF may co-occur—in a sentence with a PPP (“Itta yo, chan to kare ni”), a phrase in which a copula or interjectory particle occurs (“Shikamo da ne”), or a phrase in which CBP occurs (“koko kaikaku, u-wo”). However, if the speaker is the “author” choosing his or her own words, then co-occurrence with these phenomena is not possible.

3.4. Interrelation between other phenomena

Unlike the above three types of phenomena, the remaining four types may co-occur and affect each other in complex ways. I shall begin to show this by describing the relationship between OC and OI.

OC tends to make OI easier. To be more concrete, “zo” and “ze” tend to be natural at the end of non-predicate phrase only with copula. For example, “shikamo da zo” and “shikamo da ze” are natural unlike “??shikamo zo” and “??shikamo ze”. (We might be able to say that “shikamo da zo” and “shikamo da ze” are sentences to some degree. However this does not mean that they are not phrases at all. One reason for this is that “ze” and “zo” in “shikamo da zo” and “shikamo da ze” bear a prosodic restriction which are not found for them in the end of predicate phrase. That is to say, “ze” and “zo” in “shikamo da zo” and “shikamo da ze” are necessarily pronounced in rising intonation but never in “FLI”.) The variety of interjectory particles at the end of non-predicate phrase still increases when we add the past particle “ta” to the

copula, as in “tookyo kara da-tta kashira” and “(tashika) tookyo kara da-tta wa” (cf. “?? tookyo kara kashira” “?? tookyo kara wa”). And “wa” at the end of non-predicate phrase is uttered in rising intonation. Another example of increase of naturalness by adding “ta” is some unnatural phrases with the particle “ka” at the end of non-predicate phrase: “?tookyo kara ka” (cf. “doko kara ka”) vs. “tookyo kara da-tta ka”

OI can make non-predicate phrases more natural, as in “soreo desune” (cf. “??soreo desu”). More striking is the case with the complex copula “da-ttadesu”, as in “kare to da-tta desu kane” (cf. “??kare to da-tta desu”). However this effect of interjectory particles can be seen only when OC realizes.

We can see still more relationship between the four phenomena. This will be discussed in practical terms below, looking chiefly at the phenomenon of FLI. First we will look at the relationship between FLI, OC, and OI.

When no copula or interjectory particle appears at the end of a phrase, both returned FLI (“kare ga” (“he . . .”), “dakara” (“because . . .”); HLH) and unreturned FLI (“kare ga(a),” “dakara(a); HLHL) are possible.

When a copula but no interjectory particle appears at the end of a phrase, while returned FLI is not possible unreturned FLI may occur for a particle (“kare ga da”; HLHL). After all, unlike the way the copula of a predicate phrase may have a high tone (the “da” in “Tokyo da” is High, while the “desu” in “Tokyo desu” is High-Low), the copula of a non-predicate phrase always is low and is not subject to FLI. This is similar to the way a quotation marker “to” spoken to oneself as a separator when composing a sentence, as in “‘Bunsetsu matsubi ni’ to, ‘kopyura ga’ to, ‘arawareru ga’ to, . . .” (“‘at the end of a phrase,’ and . . . ‘a copula,’ and . . . ‘appears, but, . . .’”).

When no copula but only an interjectory particle appears at the end of a phrase, both unreturned FLI (“da kedo ne” [“that’s true, but”; HLLH) and returned FLI (“da kedo ne(e); HLLHL) are possible.

When both a copula and an interjectory particle appear at the end of a phrase, FLI may occur for the part immediately preceding the copula or for the interjectory particle immediately following it. That is, it may occur up to two times in a single phrase (“kare ga da ne(e); HLHLHL). While only unreturned FLI may occur for the part immediately preceding the copula (“??kare ga(a) da ne(e); HLH(L)HL), both returned FLI and unreturned FLI are possible for an interjectory particle.

Next, let’s look at the relationship between combination of brealing and prolongation and continuation and the other phenomena. Since as described above in Section 2.6 CBP and continuation is used in official situations by adult characters who have authority, when considering the possibility of co-occurrence with this halting we must look only at copula such as “desu” and “da” and interjectory particles such as “ne” and “na.” However, it is hard to judge whether “ee” and “aa” in “sore o da ne, ee” and “sore o desu na, aa” are part of this halting or are merely the fillers “ee” and “aa,” or if there may be instances of both cases. That is, the possibility of co-occurrence of CBP and OC or OI is unclear.

However, it is clear that co-occurrence of CBP and FLI is possible, and what’s more these two phenomena affect each other as shown below.

When CBP occurs at the end of a noun (“koozookaikaku, uuno”), both returned and unreturned FLI are possible for the end of the phrase (“koozookaikaku, uuno”; LHHHLLL, L-H; “koozookaikaku, uuno(o)”; LHHHLLL, L-HL). The extended part in CBP is simply a continuation of the immediately preceding sound, so that if the immediately preceding sound is high (“kaikaku”; LHHH), the extended part also will be high (“kaikaku, uuno(o)”; LHHH, H-Ultra High(-L)).

When CBP occurs at the end of a phrase (“koozookaikaku no, oo”), while again both returned and unreturned FLI are possible (“koozookaikaku no(o), oo; LHHHLLLH(L), L-), the extended part is not subject to the FLI, so that no matter how high the tone of the immediately preceding sound the extended part always will be low.

3.5. Four types of speech consciousness

We have grouped the seven types of phenomena into four categories based on the possibility of co-occurrence between phenomena. These four categories can be understood as differences in speaking mode.

First of all, HF can be considered a phenomenon that occurs when the speaker is pronouncing characters as a list of characters without being conscious of their meaning.

Also, DA can be considered a phenomenon that occurs at the sentence level when the speaker is conscious of the entire sentence, since a single intonation is expressed for the entire sentence. The speaker is conscious of a strong feeling connected to this intonation (i.e., a joking threat if the intonation is gently rising).

PPP also can be considered a phenomenon that occurs at the sentence level when the speaker is conscious of the entire sentence, since it manipulates the order of phrases within the sentence. However, in the case of preposed predicate the speaker is not conscious of a particularly strong feeling.

The four phenomena of OC, OI, FLI, and CBP occur when the speaker is conscious of the smaller units of individual phrases rather than the entire sentence. For this reason all the more, they may co-occur and affect each other.

4. Conclusion

By looking at seven phenomena in spoken Japanese, focusing on the relations between phenomena, this paper grouped the speaker’s speaking mode into four categories. These four categories are (i) when the speaker is conscious of the sentence as a whole and is conscious of a strong feeling connected to a specific intonation, (ii) when the speaker is conscious of the sentence as a whole but is not conscious of such a strong feeling, (iii) when the speaker’s consciousness is at the phrase level, and (iv) when the speaker is conscious only of the characters, without being conscious of their meanings.

While past studies of grammar and prosody have concentrated their conditions on category (ii), in fact there are various other types of speech consciousness, and the form of speech varies with these types. In particular, if we admit that Japanese speech often takes place in units of phrases, then perhaps we should turn our observation to category (iii) as well.

This paper has made it clear that it is only in category (iii) that a copula, interjectory particle, FLI, or CBP

may occur within a phrase, and in doing so it has showed that in this sense the structure of a phrase varies with the speech consciousness of the speaker. We also have observed the complexity of the relationship between the four phenomena in the case of category (iii). In order to unravel this complexity, there probably is a need to further deepen our understanding of the structure of the phrase in the future.

5. Acknowledgements

I thank many members of Onsei Bumpo Kenkyukai, especially Nick Campbell, and late Miyoko Sugito for extensive advice and for helping in many other ways. This work was partially supported by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (A), 23320087, and (C), 24500256.

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