

On the Concept of "Word" in the Japanese Language, with Special Reference to Postpositions and Auxiliaries

Hirano, Takanori

<https://doi.org/10.15017/2553414>

出版情報 : 文學研究. 70, pp.81-96, 1973-03-25. Faculty of Literature, Kyushu University
バージョン :
権利関係 :

On the Concept of “Word” in the Japanese Language, with Special Reference to Postpositions and Auxiliaries

HIRANO Takanori

Contents

1. Morphological Approach to the Theory of the Word.
2. Phonological Approach to the Theory of the Word.
3. Further discussion.

CHAPTER 1

A Morphological Approach to the Theory of the Word.

1.1. To define the concept of word is extremely difficult. It is as complex as in the case of “sentence.”* Even though it is difficult to define, “word” is an essential concept in the analysis of language, especially in syntax, and it should be noted that we do not find any grammars in which “word” is not dealt with.

Although words seem to be easy to delimitate in English and other Western languages because of the divisional writing, we cannot say that there are no problems. A survey of the school grammars of Japanese may give us the impression that the concept of “word” is clearly defined and that the classification of the parts of speech is sufficiently evident. But it should be understood that the description of linguistic features of Japanese must be based on the analysis of the structural features of this language, and the descriptive methods used for Indo-European languages cannot

* See, Fries, C.C. : The Structure of English. Ch. 2.

always be applied to Japanese.

Contrastive and comparative studies of different languages of the world will most probably make each language more understandable. The present study is an attempt to clarify the concept of "word" under the aspect of its relevance for Japanese and English. We will restrict the present treatment to morphological and phonological criteria with special reference to postpositions and auxiliary verbs.* The possible philosophical meaning of "word" will not be treated.

1.2. Bloomfield's concept of "word"

Bloomfield pointed out that we must observe the principle of Immediate-Constituents, abridged as I-C, in order to avoid confusions in morphological description, and he tried to define "word" within the frame of I-C analysis, to which we will not refer.

According to him, morphemes are divided into two groups, *bound* and *free* forms, and this concept is the basis of his classification of words. A *bound* form is an element that has a sort of meaning but cannot be used by itself in utterances. Affixes are included in this group. A *free* form, on the other hand, is an element that can be used independently with a sort of meaning. Stems of the various words are included in this group. Based on this distinction, the different kinds of words are classified as follows : **

A. Secondary words : containing free forms.

1. Compound words, containing more than one free form.

door-knob, wild-animal-tamer. The included free forms are the members of the compound words. In our examples the members are *door, knob, tamer*, and the phrase *wild animal*.

* Postposition is equivalent to *jo-shi*, and auxiliary to *jo-dō-shi*.

** See, Bloomfield, L. : Language, p. 209

On the Concept of "Word" in the Japanese Language, with
Special Reference to Postpositions and Auxiliaries

2. Derived secondary words : containing one free form : *boyish*, *old-maidish*. The included free form is called the underlying form. In our examples the underlying forms are the word *boy* and the phrase *old maid*.
- B. Primary words : not containing a free form :
 1. Derived primary words : containing more than one bound form : *re-ceive*, *de-ceive*, *con-ceive*, *re-tain*, *con-tain*.
 2. Morpheme-words : Consisting of a single (free) morpheme : *man*, *boy*, *cut*, *run*, *red*, *big*.

It is, of course, possible to offer more examples. And one could add inflectional endings to these examples. The final elements in *cut-s*, *run-s*; *boy-s*, *girl-s*; *play-ing*, *contain-ing*; etc. are some examples. (Of course, other plural morphemes may be taken up, but we refer only to the most obvious examples, because our present aim is not to deal with morpheme itself.)

By using the bracket { } to delimitate a morpheme, we can indicate morphemes as { Z_1 }, { Z_2 }, {-ing} etc. If so, these are the elements which cannot exist by themselves because they are always bound to some other elements. They are, therefore, not words but elements constituting words. Indeed, bound forms play an important role in syntax and their function must be distinguished from that of derivative endings.

Therefore, it must be noticed that a bound form cannot come into existence by itself, and that a word must include at least one free morpheme in almost all cases, except in derived primary words as indicated above. Unfortunately there still remain difficult problems even with this classification. Take some examples of them : How do we treat *mul-* in *mulberry*? Is *for* in *for goodness' sake* the same as *for* in *forget*? Is the treatment of each element in *forget-me-not* clear?*

* See, Carrol, J.B. : Language and Thought. pp. 18—19

examples, the classification may be of great use in as much as it hints at a systematic explanation of the word.

Generally speaking, a word has at least one free morpheme as I-C, and a *bound* morpheme by itself cannot be considered as a word. A *bound* morpheme constitutes a word by combining with other elements, e.g. *bound+bound*, *free+bound*, etc..

1.3. Postposition and Auxiliary Verb in Japanese

In terms of the theory, outlined above, we will approach the concept of the Japanese word. First of all some points noticed in the course of a morphological study of Japanese will be mentioned.

1.3.1 Postposition

In Japanese we can also distinguish free and bound forms. For instance, *hon* "book", *cukue* "desk" and *kami* "paper", these are all *free* morphemes. Let us consider, then, the forms to which postpositions are attached. Take the following sentence as an example :

私は 君に 本を あげる

Watasi-wa kimi-ni hon-o ageru.

"I give you a book."

It must, of course, be understood that *-wa*, *-o*, and *-ni* cannot come into being by themselves in the sentence, because only the combination of *-wa* with *watasi*, *-o* with *hon* and *-ni* with *kimi* respectively can function as a syntactic unit. They are bound morphemes which cannot appear without being related to free morphemes such as *watasi*, *kimi* and *hon*. It is impossible to delete *-wa*, *-ni*, *-o* from the above sentence, except in specific situational contexts. There is no utterance like *-wa*, *-ni*, *-o*; but there may be an utterance like *watasi* under the condition of a specific context or situation. "*Dare desu ka?*" — "*Watasi.*" These are elements constituting words. *Watasiwa* is, therefore,

On the Concept of "Word" in the Japanese Language, with Special Reference to Postpositions and Auxiliaries considered as one word constituted by a free morpheme *watasi* and a bound morpheme *-wa*. Notice that we cannot delete *-wa*, *-ni* and *-o* etc. from utterances independently.

Now the above sentence will be divided in the following way, and the parts will be numbered. (Japanese morphology is, of course, treated synchronically.)

Watasi-wa kimi-ni hon-o ag-e-ru
 1 2 3 4

Now the following expressions can be obtained by changing the word-order.

Watasi-wa hon-o kimi-ni ag-e-ru, (1324)

Kimi-ni watasi-wa hon-o ag-e-ru, (2134)

Kimi-ni hon-o watasi-wa ag-e-ru. (2314)

Hon-o kimi-ni watasi-wa ag-e-ru. (3214)

Hon-o watasi-wa kimi-ni ag-e-ru. (3124) etc.

More expressions are possible in specific contexts. Notice that each numbered part is always used as a whole. This means that each of these parts is one word, and moreover *-wa*, *-ni*, *-o* are bound morphemes with specific syntactical functions*. Therefore they cannot correspond to words. This leads us to the conclusion that Japanese postpositions do not form a word-class, but a morpheme-class: in other words, postpositions have no word status, but only morpheme status.

1.3.2 Auxiliary verb

Now we will explain another aspect of the problem without changing the word-order of the example *Watasi-wa kimi-ni hon-o ag-e-ru*.

* Notice the syntagmatic differences between the Japanese and the Western languages. Japanese: Only bound morphemes can be inserted.

私は→私達は etc. cf. 私(達)の(お)父(さん)は

Free morphemes can be inserted between articles and nouns in the latter cases. der *kleine* Prinz, a *black* coffee

For convenience sake, only parts of *ag-e-ru* will be substituted by other elements. If the element *-ta*, expressing past tense, is substituted for *-ru*, we have the sentence, *Watasi-wa kimi-ni hon-o ag-e-ta*. *-ta* is usually considered as one word, as auxiliary verb, in school grammar. But is it possible to say that *-ta* is a free morpheme in the sentence? *-ta* by itself is, of course, not equivalent to independent elements in an utterance. In other words, *-ta* cannot be treated in the same way as *watasi*, which can be used independently in utterances.

We can, therefore, conclude that *-ta* is only a bound-morpheme and cannot be an element equivalent to one word.

The same holds good for *-mas-u*. As the example, *Watasi-wa kimi-ni hon-o ag-e-mas-u*, clearly shows, *-mas-u* is neither an independent element nor a free morpheme. (*-masu* can be further analysed into two bound morphemes, *-mas-* and *-u*, a present tense morpheme.) It must also be clearly understood that neither *-ta* nor *-masu* is equivalent to one word in expressions, like *ag-e-mas-i-ta*.

In this way, we like to emphasize the fact that the Japanese verb consists of at least two bound morphemes (e.g. *yom-u* "to read"). When the auxiliary verb is attached to it, one bound morpheme is substituted for the other bound morpheme.

1.4 Some problems of "word" in English

In addition to the problems of "word" in English, mentioned in J.B. Carroll's "Language and Thought", let us look at some other phenomena which hint at a new concept of "word".

It seems to us that articles and prepositions in English belong to the class of bound morphemes, if a bound morpheme is defined as the element that has some kind of meaning and is not used by itself in acceptable utterances. They are significant only when they are attached to the following noun. But both articles and

On the Concept of "Word" in the Japanese Language, with
Special Reference to Postpositions and Auxiliaries
prepositions are, in fact, traditionally treated as words, and they
are separated by spaces from other elements in conventional
writing system.

Are they bound morphemes in the same sense as the
postpositions and the auxiliary verbs of Japanese? We cannot
accept this on the ground that prepositions and articles do not
have the same function as postpositions and auxiliary verbs in
Japanese. Japanese postpositions and auxiliary verbs are able to
have grammatical function, as was shown in 1.3. We hold that a
bound morpheme must be an element which functions in a
grammatical process, as indicated by E. Sapir.* Under this
condition we may conclude that Japanese postpositions and auxiliary
verbs satisfy this requirement. Prepositions and articles of
English, on the other hand, cannot do it except in the sentences
in which both indirect and direct objects are used.

Moreover, bound morphemes themselves must be divided into
derivative and inflectional elements. Japanese postpositions and
auxiliary verbs are regarded as elements which have a function in
a grammatical process and neither preposition nor article** in
English does not belong to them. It is, therefore, appropriate
to deal with them as "words".

1.5 In this way, it becomes evident that the description of
Japanese is not yet completed. Therefore, it is more essential
to describe Japanese on the level of morphemes than on that of
words.

The treatment of words in school grammar seems incomplete,
because there exists the confusion of the morpheme level with the
word level.

* See, Sapir, E. : Language

** See, Bloomfield, L. : Language, in which he explains them in terms
of parallelism.

CHAPTER 2

A Phonological Approach to the Theory of the Word.

2.1 Some considerations of "Phonetic Word"

There are many ways to identify or determine words in a given language. For instance, the concept of words, on the one hand, is determined on the basis of "form". On the other, it is based on "function". Moreover, it can be determined on the basis of phonetic properties which characterize the "phonetic word".

The question of postpositions will now be dealt with from the viewpoint of "phonetic word". It must be noted that only one musical accent can be put on one given phonetic word in Japanese, esp. in the Tokyo dialect. We take the following phrase as examples. (A musical accent in a given phrase is indicated by a line over the syllables.)

- i. $\overline{\text{neko}}$, $\overline{\text{nekowa}}$, $\overline{\text{nekokara}}$, $\overline{\text{nekomade}}$,
- ii. $\overline{\text{inu}}$, $\overline{\text{inuwa}}$, $\overline{\text{inukara}}$, $\overline{\text{inumade}}$,

In the above examples, the most important fact is that each phrase has only one musical accent and that the accent does not shift even when a postposition is added. We must call attention to the fact that $\overline{\text{ne}}$ of $\overline{\text{neko}}$ cannot be transferred even if any postposition comes after *neko*.

This leads us to the conclusion that postpositions in Japanese should not be regarded as words, but only as suffixes included in a given word from the phonological view of "word". $\overline{\text{neko}}$, of course, forms one word, and $\overline{\text{nekowa}}$, $\overline{\text{nekokara}}$ etc., therefore, form each one word, which has only one musical accent.

The contrast of this fact with the phenomenon of "vowel harmony", which is the common characteristic of Altaic lan-

On the Concept of "Word" in the Japanese Language, with
Special Reference to Postpositions and Auxiliaries
guages*, must convince us that a postposition in Japanese
corresponds only to a suffix with an important function in syntax,
but not to a word. In order to explain postpositions as suffixes,
I will give some examples of vowel harmony.

1.1.2 "Vowel Harmony"

Vowel harmony can play an important role in the identification
of words. The realm over which vowel harmony works is
regarded as one word. Some examples from Osmanli (Turkish) :

ev "house" is, of course, one word by itself. And many
words can be derived from this word by adding suffixes.

evim : "my house"
evin : genitive form of ev
evi : accusative
evden : ablative
evler : plural

etc.

at "horse"

atım : "my horse"
atın : genitive
atı : accusative
atdan : ablative
atlar : plural

etc.

These are regarded as one word respectively. *-ler/-lar* is
changed according to the preceding vowel. Thus, the vowels in
a given word are almost perfectly harmonized except in some
borrowed words. The conclusion mentioned before must be
repeated here. The realm over which vowel harmony works is

* By this comparison, I do not want to suggest that Japanese is possibly
an Altaic language, since my arguments are all based on synchronic
observations.

regarded as one word. A word identified in this way is a kind of phonetic words.

1.1.3 Conclusion

We want to emphasize the fact that a word to which postpositions are added must be regarded as one word from a phonological viewpoint.

The consideration of the cause of vowel harmony will be of great use to confirm more precisely that postpositions should be considered only as suffixes included in words.

The phonological property that almost all Turkish dialects put an accent on the last syllable (ultima) developed only recently. It seems likely that in the Altaic languages stress was originally put on the first syllable. The cause for the weakening of the final consonant is also reduced to the assumption, and the cause of the development of vowel harmony could also be explained by this assumption.*

Originally the vowel harmony was caused by the stress being put on the first syllable, not on the suffix. Japanese postpositions do not have any accents except in special contextual situations, in which we find an analogy to the delimitation of words by means of vowel harmony. So that we have another reason for not considering postpositions as separate words.

Historically, a postposition such as *-e* developed from an independent word “*辺*” meaning “place”, but almost all Japanese, except Linguists, are not aware of this development.

Moreover, Japanese postpositions sometimes consist of bound morphemes according to Bloomfieldian terminology, though they play an important role in the word order of Japanese. Bound morphemes cannot be regarded as words, but only as suffixes.

* See, “日本語の歴史” (平凡社) Vol.1. pp. 236—237

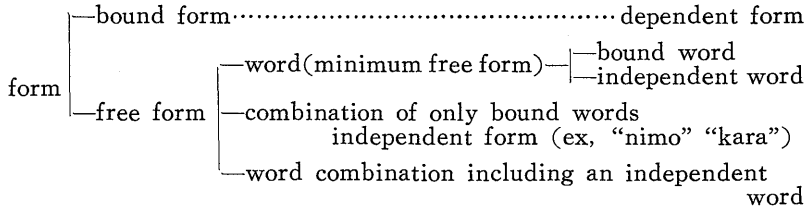
CHAPTER III

Further Discussion

Although the basic unit of language is important in linguistics, it is, in fact, still difficult to define, in other words, to clarify by which criterion it should be identified. For the criteria usually vary from linguist to linguist.

Here we will sum up the main assumptions in relation to our own line of argument and give a general conclusion.

According to Dr. Shirō Hattori, the difficulty in defining "word" results from the fact that a bound word, 附属語, a kind of word, is weak independently and usually uttered in a series of other words and therefore difficult to distinguish from a bound form, 附属形式. Here Dr. Hattori's classification in brief outlines :



(Translation of Japanese terminology adapted by Hirano.)

"bound word" - (附属語) : a word which is usually in a series of other words, and rarely appears as an utterance 発話, or an utterance-segment 発話段落 equivalent to a sentence (that is, as an utterance-segment between phonetic pauses).

"bound form" (附属形式) : a form which is usually uttered in a series of other forms and never appears as an utterance or utterance-segment.

"independent word" (自立語) : a word which also appears as an utterance, and sometimes appears as an utterance or an utterance-segment to a sentence.

"dependent form" (非自立形式) : a bound form, a bound

word as a whole.

As far as Dr. Hattori's terminology is concerned, I do not object to his idea that an "independent word", 自立語, as a word is included in "free forms", but it may be impossible to include a "bound word" here, moreover, to include the "combination of only bound words" in "free forms", because even the combination of only bound words does not differ from a bound word in its grammatical function.

A quote from Prof. Haruhiko kindaiichi's book "日本語" may explain Dr. Hattori's criteria.

"If we made children write or describe *ikasetakara*, they would usually divide it into *ikaseta* and *kara*. (Musical) accents will be divided into two parts like *ikasetakarā*. Dr. Hattori suggested in his thesis 'Bound words and Bound Forms, 附屬語と附屬形式' the exact way of dividing linguistic expressions into words widely applicable to languages of the world. According to him, the so-called postposition will be generally equivalent to an independent word. But a small number of expressions such as *na* expressing prohibition, *ba*, *te*, *dewa*, *temo* etc. called conjunctive postpositions are equivalent to the suffix of verbs. The so-called auxiliary verbs except *da*, *rasii* and *daroo* are not independent words. These all are given independency only when they are combined with the preceding verb. That is to say, *ikasetakara* before indicated is unanimously divided into *ikaseta* and *kara*. It seems to me (Prof. kindaiichi) that this theory is the powerful enough to cut the Gordian knot of grammar."*

As far as I see, this theory, nevertheless, seems to complicate the grammar. Except the conjunctive as *ba*, *te*, *dewa* and prohibitional *na*, Dr. Hattori treats the postpositions as independent words. From a morphological viewpoint, we conclude that the postpositions of Japanese including *na*, *ba*, *te*, *dewa* and *temo* are

* See, Kindaiichi, H. : 日本語, p. 108

On the Concept of "Word" in the Japanese Language, with Special Reference to Postpositions and Auxiliaries undoubtedly bound morphemes. They are not equivalent to minimum free forms, because of the fact that a postposition should not be treated as one word.

Here the case of the auxiliary verb in Japanese must again be referred to. Dr. Hattori accepts *da*, *rasii* and *daroo* each as independent words, though he does not accept other auxiliary verbs as words. *daroo*, *da* etc., indeed, contained originally a copula, but from a synchronic viewpoint they have the same grammatical function as *-u*, *-yoo* and *-ta* etc.. It is, therefore, even more appropriate than in the case of postpositions to regard them as bound forms.

In this way, we hold that almost none of the postpositions and the auxiliary verbs in Japanese should be determined as independent words.

Some examples pertinent to the above conclusion will be described in the following way.

The accentuation of the Tokyo dialect, in general, has the following tendency : *

- i : If the first *mōra* is *high*, the second is always *low*. If the first is *low*, the second is always *high*. It must be noted that there is a regular difference between the first and the second *mōrae* in pitch.
- ii : It never occurs that if the intermediate *mōra*, (i.e. the second *mōra* consisting of three *mōrae*), is *low*, the first and the third are *high*. In other words, the *mōrae* with *high* pitches cannot exist apart in any case. **

This may be directly connected with the case of postpositions and auxiliary verbs. But a consideration of their position in a sentence

* Ibid. p. 92

** See, Arisaka, H. : 音韻論 p.126. fn. 10

“たとえば、ハシガ (箸が) ハシガ (橋が) ハシガ (端が) という型が存在しうるが、ハシガ という型は存在しない。”

will attach importance to this fact. We must pay attention to the fact that postpositions and auxiliary verbs cannot have an independent accent, and the possibility to put an accent on them is limited to the case that a preceding mōra with an accent (a part of noun, verb) appears. A postposition that has an independent accent is regularly one consisting of two mōrae such as *kara* of *ikasetakara*. (I consider this as similar to cases like *uma* "horse" and *niwa* "garden".) The following statement supports our assumption.*

"It may be said that (the accent of Japanese functions as the operator who can determine the range of words.)

'*niwa no sakura mo minna tittle simatta*'** can be taken as an example. This sentence is accentuated as follows.

niwanō sakuramō minna tittle simatta. According to this example, it must be understood that the mōrae with a low pitch show the boundary of words."

The observation offered by Prof. H. Kindaichi that the low pitch shows the boundary of words is not always consistent with Dr. Hattori's criteria, in spite of his opinion that Dr. Hattori's theory can cut the Gordian knot of grammar.

In this way, it is appropriate that we treat *ikasetakara* as one word on the ground that *kara* cannot be treated as an independent form (word) for the morphological reasons, although the accents are shown as *ikasetakara*. The morphemes constituting *ikasetakara* are described as *ik-a-s-e-ta-kara*.

Therefore the rule that a low pitch shows the boundary of words should be modified: The mōrae with a low pitch show the boundary of words in almost all cases except in some exceptions. In other words they are not always the remarcation of words, as shown in *ikasetakara*.

* See, Kindaidhi, H.: 日本語 p. 95

** "The cherry blossoms in the garden have fallen completely."

On the Concept of "Word" in the Japanese Language, with
Special Reference to Postpositions and Auxiliaries
Now we refer to another of Prof. H. Kindaichi's statements.

"According to the terminology of Dr. Arisaka, it is said that the accent of the Japanese language has a controlling (or culminative) function rather than a distinctive function.* In other words, the Japanese accentuation has the function to determine one word as a whole rather than the function to distinguish the meaning of words."**

Thus it can be said that the system of the Japanese accentuation has a controlling function in almost all cases. Consequently it has a word-controlling or dominating function to give the linguistic expression the contour of one word, the phenomenon of which accurately corresponds to "vowel harmony" in Turkish already referred to in chapter 2. The following statement by Dr. Arisaka in his "音韻論" will clarify this.

"Concerning the fact that the combinative alternance is based on the controlling function, two phenomena existing in the so-called Ural-Altai languages, esp. in Finno-ugric languages — vowel harmony and consonantal alternance offered by L'. Novák are the prominent examples."***

Further, Dr. Arisaka states :

"When the combination of phonemes constitutes 文節 (bunsetsu — the smallest unit of utterance) in the case of Japanese, the function which each phoneme carries varies. For instance, in the Tokyo dialect the phoneme ((g)) stands only at Anlaut of bunsetsu as a rule, and ((ŋ)) stands at the other places of bunsetsu. Therefore, the fact that the postposition *ga* appears only as ((ŋa)) will prove that it does not constitute an independent *phonological word*."****

According to Prof. S. Murayama at Kyushu University, the

* controlling function (統成的機能), distinctive function (示差的機能)

** See, Kindaichi, H. : 日本語 p. 95

*** See, Arisaka, H. : 音韻論 p. 124

**** See, Dr. Arisaka's "音韻論" p. 117

Russian linguist, Polivanov has already regarded “postpositions” as suffixes from both viewpoints of the accent and the morphological theory, similar to *free form* and *bound form* by L. Bloomfield.

In this way we are led to the conclusion that postpositions and auxiliary verbs of Japanese should not be taken as independent words morphologically nor phonologically. But we have to notice that elements with an accent are not always equivalent to one word, because there are some examples of postpositions consisting of more than one *mōra*.

Generally speaking, we consider it essential to find morphological criteria and something having a culminative or controlling function. Thus, their greatest common measure will be the important criteria for the identification of *word* in many languages, except tone languages.

Suffixes noticed in Japanese including postpositions and auxiliary verbs* will be determined by the fact that they cannot usually have an independent accent and the fact that they, excluding postpositions, can be inflected.

References

1. 日本語の歴史 Vol. 1 (平凡社)
2. Fries, C.C. : The Structure of English
3. Bloomfield, L. : Language
4. Carrol, J.B. : Language and Thought
5. 市川 三喜 (ed.) : 英語学辞典
6. 服部 四郎 : 附属語と附属形式 (言語学の方法, pp. 461—491)
7. 金田一春彦 : 日本語
8. 有坂 秀世 : 音韻論
9. 阪倉 篤義 : 語構成の研究
10. Lyons, J. : Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics pp. 194—206

注記：この小論は昭和45年11月21日に九州大学教養部に於いて行なわれた第11回九州大学言語科学研究会で発表したものを、その後まとめたものである。

* From a typological viewpoint, the writer does not agree to a treatment of the postpositions and the auxiliary verbs as authentic suffixes. The degree of their status as suffixes varies. Terminologically it will be well to give them different terms similar to “suffix”.