

Word classes (syntactic categories) in Japanese

- Note: When working with this handout, refer to the data-set handout called “Google data: Word classes in Japanese” for data that might help answer some of the questions raised here.

- (1) How should we answer this question? — “What is a noun?”
 - (a) Meaning-based definition: “a person, place, or thing”
 - (b) Morphology-based definition (English): A word that forms a plural by adding *-(e)s*
 - (c) Distribution-based definition (English): A word that can occur immediately following an article or *which* to form a complete phrase
 - Which of these definitions will allow us to more accurately identify the nouns in English?
 - In what situations does it *matter* if a word is a noun or not?
- (2) Goal: To develop **morphology-based** and **distribution-based** definitions for (some of) the word classes in Japanese that allow us to unambiguously identify each class

I. Open-class categories

- (3) Open-class categories generally have “real-world” or lexical meaning
 - There are generally many, many examples in each category
 - New items can be created (loanwords, derived words, new coinages); hence “open”
 - Typical examples: noun, verb, adjective

1. Verbs (V)

- (4) *Genki* check:

(p 58) “Verbs in Japanese conjugate, or take various shapes. [...] There are two kinds of verbs that follow regular conjugation patterns [...]”

 - Does anything else in Japanese conjugate?
 - If so, is that conjugation patterns the same, or different, as compared to verbs?
- (5) The best **diagnostic** for a verb in Japanese: it takes the **verb inflectional affixes** (i.e., the suffixes that produce the different conjugational forms for verbs)
 - See verb morphology data set for verb inflectional affixes

2. Adjectives (A)

- (6) *Genki* check:

(p 100) “There are two types of adjectives in Japanese. One type is called ‘*い* <i>-adjectives,’ and the other type ‘*な* <na>-adjectives.’ *い* and *な* are their last syllables when they modify nouns.”

 - How similar are these two categories? (Why is *Genki* lumping them together?)
 - Does a so-called ‘*i*-adjective’ always end in *-i* when it modifies a noun?

- (7) Our analysis:
- (a) We will use the term **adjective** to refer to so-called ‘*i*-adjectives’ specifically
 - (b) For so-called ‘*na*-adjectives’, we will use the term **adjectival noun (AN)**
 - In Japanese school grammar, AN are called 形容動詞 *keiyodoosi*, or ‘adjectival verbs,’ but this isn’t a very accurate name (in Modern Japanese at least)
- (8) Our main **diagnostic** for adjectives: the ability to take the **adjective inflectional affixes**
- See adjective morphology data set for adjective inflectional affixes
- (9) See below for a direct comparison of A vs. AN vs. N

3. Nouns (N)

- (10) *Genki* check: Does not define ‘noun’; seems to assume the category is self-explanatory
- (11) Some **distributional** criteria for identifying nouns
- (a) Nouns may be directly followed by a case marker
 - Case markers include: *-ga* が NOMINATIVE, *-o* を ACCUSATIVE, *-ni* に DATIVE/LOCATIVE
 - Can any other categories be directly followed by *ga/o/ni*? Which case marker is the **best** diagnostic for nouns?
 - (b) Nouns may be directly preceded by a demonstrative
 - Demonstratives include: *kono* この ‘this’, *sono* その ‘that’, *ano* あの ‘that over there’, *dono* どの ‘which?’
 - Can any other categories be directly preceded by a demonstrative?
 - A better diagnostic: Nouns can appear in the **frame** DEMONSTRATIVE ___ CASE MARKER
- (12) Some other **distributional** facts about nouns — but these are **not unique to nouns**
- (d) A noun may modify another noun with the construction N no N (*-no* の is a GENITIVE/POSSESSIVE [case?] marker)
 - (e) Nouns can occur with the copula in all of its conjugational forms
 - **copula**: the “linking verb”; has the basic meaning ‘X = Y.’
 - (i) *hon da* (informal) ‘(It) is a book.’
hon desu (formal)
 - (ii) *hon zya nai* ‘(It) is not a book.’
hon zya nai desu/zya arimasen
 - (iii) *hon datta* ‘(It) was a book.’
hon desita
 - (iv) *hon zya nakatta* ‘(It) was not a book.’
hon zya nakatta desu/zya arimasen desita
 - (v) *hon daroo* ‘(It) is probably a book.’
hon desyoo

4. Adjectival nouns (AN)

- (13) Are these a distinct word class in Japanese?
- (14) Properties of N, AN, A as described by linguists (e.g., Shibatani 1990, Tsujimura 2005)
- How well are these generalizations borne out by Google hit patterns?

	<i>N</i>	<i>AN</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>Has conjugation?</i>	no	no	yes
<i>Occurs with all forms of copula?</i>	yes	yes	no
<i>Form used when modifying a N?</i>	__+no N	__+na N	(various conjugated forms are used)
<i>Can be subject or object of a sentence?</i>	yes	no	no
<i>Can occur with suffix -sa?</i>	no	yes	yes
<i>Can occur with suffix -rasi-(i)?</i>	yes	no	no

- AN share some properties with N, and some with A
 - If we consider **conjugation** as the main diagnostic of V and A, then AN are more like N than they are like A — hence the name *adjectival noun*
 - But the important point is that we recognize AN as a distinct category; the name used (*na*-adjective, nominal adjective, “adjectival verb” (?!), ...) is less important
- (15) AN **diagnostics**: The best argument that a word is an AN, rather than a N, is to show that both (a) and (b) (and possibly also (c)) are true
- (a) AN are followed by *-na* when they modify a N
 - (b) AN can appear with all forms of the copula
 - (c) Most AN do not generally cooccur with case markers
- (16) Borrowed adjectives (Sino-Japanese forms or more recent loanwords) often end up as AN

5. Verbal nouns (VN)

- (17) Japanese has a common construction in which some non-inflecting words can be directly followed by the verb *suru* ‘do’ with no (accusative) case marker
- (a) The combination VN+*suru* functions as a verb
 - (b) Note: *suru* is irregular; the nonpast form is /*suru*/, but for most other forms, it acts as though its root is /*si-*/: /*si-na-i*/, /*si-ta*/, /*si-mas-u*/, etc.
- (18) The non-inflecting words that follow this pattern are called **verbal nouns** (VN)

- (19) Many VN are Sino-Japanese words, but non-Chinese loans and deverbal nouns (nouns formed from verbs) can be VN too
- (20) VN (unlike AN) appear to pass all tests for N status (see (14)) — so these can technically be considered a **special subcase of N** rather than an independent word class
- (21) Some data to consider:
- | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|------------|----------------|------------------|
| | <i>minna</i> | ‘everyone’ | <i>nihongo</i> | ‘Japanese lg’ |
| Minna-ga nihongo-o naratta. | <i>naratta</i> | ‘learned’ | <i>benkyoo</i> | ‘study’ |
| | | | <i>tanosii</i> | ‘fun, enjoyable’ |
- Minna-ga nihongo-o benkyoo-sita.
- Minna-ga [nihongo-no benkyoo]-o sita.
- [Nihongo-no benkyoo]-ga totemo tanosii.

6. Adverbs

- (22) Some adverbs are formed from adjectives (see adjective morphology data set)
- (23) There are also “independent” adverbs — *totemo*, *zutto*, *zenzen*, etc.
- (24) In English, adverbs can modify V, A, and other adverbs, as well as sentences. What is the case in Japanese?
- (25) To think about: Is there a consistent way of identifying when a word is an adverb in Japanese?

II. Closed-class categories

- (26) Closed-class categories generally have “grammatical” meaning
- There are generally a small number of examples in each category
 - New items can not usually be easily created; hence “closed”
 - Typical examples: prepositions/postpositions, “particles”, demonstratives...
- (27) Interesting question for Japanese:
- Is there a difference between case markers and postpositions? (Yes! —> later)