

Classical Japanese morphology and syntax

This handout is based largely on examples and discussion from Komai (1979).

- (1) The term “Classical Japanese” (文語) can refer to:
 - (a) The language of the Heian period (794-1185) as attested in poetry and prose (sometimes the term also includes the Nara period, 710-794)
 - In this sense, “Classical Japanese” is thought to represent the spoken language of that time fairly closely as well
 - (b) The formal written style of Japanese that was still in use as late as WWII for certain styles of documents
 - Used in this sense, “Classical Japanese” is a written language that diverges from the writer’s own spoken language (imagine an Italian speaker writing in Latin)
- (2) Some notes on the examples shown here:
 - (a) CJ = Classical Japanese; NJ = modern (“new”) standard/Tokyo Japanese equivalent (sometimes a little stiff for purposes of comparison with the CJ example)
 - (b) Data in this handout are taken (CJ, NJ) or adapted (NJ) from Komai (1979), who presents simplified examples (not necessarily excerpted from an actual historical text) for clarity in illustrating grammatical points
 - (c) I have transliterated all *ha*-row kana in the CJ examples with <p>, including the precursors to modern *wa* (topic marker) and *e* (postposition ‘toward’)
- (3) Focus of our discussion:
 - What differences from modern (Tokyo) Japanese can be seen in the following examples?
 - Advanced language students: Can you think of any sayings, proverbs, etc., that still exemplify these older patterns of grammar?

I. Verb and adjective conjugations

- Apologies for repeated use of ‘die’! Komai chooses it because of the way it illustrates conjugational forms.

- (4)

	生あるものは	必ず	死ぬ		
CJ:	<sei> aru mono-pa	kanarazu	<u>sinu</u>		
NJ:	sei aru mono-wa	kanarazu	sinu		
	<i>life exist person-TOP</i>	<i>certainly</i>	<i>die-</i>		‘Those who have lives will certainly die.’
- (5)

	谷に落ちて	死ぬる	もの	多し
CJ:	tani ni otite	<u>sinuru</u>	mono	oposi
NJ:	tani ni otite	sinu	mono-ga	ooi
	<i>gorge in fall-CONT</i>	<i>die-</i>	<i>person(-NOM)</i>	<i>numerous</i>
	‘There are many people who fall into gorges and die.’			
- (6)

	死ぬる	は	安し
CJ:	<u>sinuru</u>	pa	yasusi
NJ:	sinu	koto wa	yasasii
	<i>die-</i>	<i>(thing)-TOP</i>	<i>easy</i>
	‘It is easy to die.’		

- (7) 寒し
 CJ: samusi
 NJ: samui
cold-
 'It is cold.'
- (8) 寒き日
 CJ: samuki pi
 NJ: samui hi
cold- day
 'a cold day'
- (9) 美し
 CJ: utukusi
 NJ: utokusii
beautiful-
 'It is beautiful.'
- (10) 美しき 物
 CJ: utokusiki mono
 NJ: utokusii mono
beautiful- thing
 'a beautiful thing'

(11) Points to note from these examples:

- (a) V, A had two separate conjugational forms where modern Japanese usually has one (but the copula still makes the distinction)
- Sentence-final form (終止形, *syuusi-kei*)
 - Pre-nominal form (連体形, *rentai-kei*) — can take a case particle (implications?)
- (b) There were two different conjugation classes of A

II. The case suffix *-ga*

- (12) 京へは 太郎が 行きたり
 CJ: miyako pe pa Tarau-**ga** iki-tari
 NJ: miyako e wa Taroo-ga it-ta
capital to TOP Taroo- went
 ‘It was Taroo who went to the capital.’ [Komai’s translation; comments?]

- (13) 太郎が 作る めし うまし
 CJ: Tarau-**ga** tukuru mesi umasi
 NJ: Taroo-ga tukuru gohan-wa oisii
Taroo- make meals(-TOP) delicious
 ‘The meals that Taroo makes are tasty.’

- (14) うぐひす 梅が 枝に 鳴く
 CJ: ugupisu ume-**ga** e ni naku
 NJ: uguisu-wa ume-no eda de naku
nightingale(-TOP) plum- branch on sing
 ‘A nightingale sings on a plum branch.’ [i.e, ‘plum’s branch’]

- (15) 太郎が 家に 行かむ
 CJ: Tarau-**ga** ipe ni ika-mu
 NJ: Taroo-no uti ni ik-oo
Taroo- house to go-VOL
 ‘I’ll go to Taroo’s house.’

- (16) この歌 柿本人麿が なり
 CJ: kono uta Kaki-no-moto Pitomaro-**ga** nari
 NJ: koto uta-wa Kaki-no-moto Hitomaro no desu
this poem(-TOP) K. - COPULA
 ‘This poem is Kaki-no-moto (no) Hitomaro’s.’

- What does CJ *-ga* mean?

References

Komai, Akira. 1979. *A Grammar of Classical Japanese*. Chicago: Culver Publishing.