

Tense, aspect, and verb classes
I. Introduction: Tense and aspect in English and Japanese

(1) How would we complete the following translations from English into Japanese?

(a) ‘Yesterday, before I did my homework, I watched TV.’

Kinoo, syukudai-o _____ mae ni, terebi-o mi-ta. → su-ru
yesterday homework-ACC { DO } before NI TV-ACC watch-TA

(b) ‘Tomorrow, after I wash the car, I will make supper.’

Asita, kuruma-o _____ ato de, syokuzi-o tukuru. → arat-ta
tomorrow car-ACC { WASH } after DE meal-ACC make-RU

(2) How would we translate these examples from Japanese into English?

(a) Ken-wa susi-o tabe-te+i-ru.

Ken-TOP sushi-ACC eat-TE+I-RU

- PROGRESSIVE: ‘Ken is currently in the process of eating sushi.’
- PERFECT/RESULTATIVE: ‘Ken has eaten sushi.’ (*has the experience of or has just now*)

(b) Kaeru-ga sin-de+i-ru.

frog-NOM die-TE+I-RU

- Cannot mean: ‘A/the frog is dying right before our eyes.’
- Must mean: ‘A/the frog has died (=is dead).’

(3) Japanese **tense** and **aspect** categories often behave differently from (apparently) similar categories in English

(a) Is the *-ta* form really “past tense”? Is the *-ru* form really “present tense”?

(b) Is the *-te+i-ru* form really “progressive aspect” like English *be* ___-ing?

- Goal of discussion: To introduce some linguistic concepts related to tense and aspect that will help illuminate some of these differences between the way that tense and aspect categories are expressed in Japanese and English.

(4) Terminology Comrie (1976: 1-3), as presented by Ogihara (1999) — emphasis added

(a) “**Tense** relates the **time** of the situation referred to to some other time...”

(b) **Aspect**—“different ways of viewing the **internal temporal consistency** of a situation”

- We can also distinguish between:

(i) **Viewpoint aspect**: Whether the speaker views a situation as not having started, as being completed, as being ongoing, etc.

(ii) **Lexical aspect**: Intrinsic differences between predicates with respect to how the situation can be viewed, which are partly based on the meaning of the predicate and partly arbitrary (similar to what we saw with thematic roles)

II. Tense in Japanese

- (5) If tense establishes **relationships among times**, how can we interpret the differences between English and Japanese in how tense categories are used?

(a) Kinoo, syukudai-o su-ru mae ni, terebi-o mi-ta.
yesterday homework-ACC do-RU before NI TV-ACC watch-TA

‘Yesterday, before I **did** my homework, I watched TV.’

Timeline: watch TV **do homework** *utterance time*

(b) Asita, kuruma-o arat-ta ato de, syokuzi-o tukuru.
tomorrow car-ACC wash-TA after DE meal-ACC make-RU

‘Tomorrow, after I **wash** the car, I will make supper.’

Timeline: *utterance time* **wash car** make supper

- (6) **absolute** tense (*English*): Marks temporal relationships with respect to the **utterance time**
relative tense (*Japanese*): Marks temporal relationships with respect to **some contextually salient time**, which *may or may not be the utterance time*

- (7) **Relative tense** in Japanese (See Ogihara (1999) for more discussion.)

V-*ru* ‘V(P) does not precede some contextually salient time’ ≈ “nonpast”

V-*ta* ‘V(P) precedes some contextually salient time’ ≈ “past”

- (8) *pro* Nihon e ik-u mae ni, *pro* nihongo-o benkyoo.su-ru.
(I) Japan to go-RU before NI (I) Japanese study-RU
 ‘Before I {GO} to Japan, I {STUDY} Japanese.’

- Any claims about *study* vs. *utterance time*?
- Any claims about *study* vs. *go*?

- (9) Another difference between English and Japanese: tense in complements of ‘say’-type Vs

Ken-wa [Aya-ga byooki datta] to it-ta
Ken Aya sick COPULA-TA C say-TA

- Aya’s reading has to **precede Ken’s saying**. ≈ ‘Ken said that Aya had been sick.’
 (Not the same as English past in a relative clause: ‘Ken said that Aya was sick.’)

Timeline: (Aya) be sick (Ken) say
 (Ken) say *utterance time*
 • Any claims about *be sick* vs. *utterance time*?

III. Lexical aspect: Predicates belong to different aspectual categories

(10) English VPs (Vendler/Dowty) — note that both the verb and its arguments can matter

- (a) state Aya knew French.
- (b) activity Aya ate apples.
- (c) accomplishment Aya ate the apple.
- (d) achievement Aya reached the summit.

(11) Semantic differences among these categories *in English* (Vendler/Dowty system)

Lex aspect class	Diagnostics (English)			Example
(a) state	• duration	• have no endpoint ...for an hour ok	no <i>be+ing</i>	Aya <u>knew</u> French.
(b) activity			<i>be+ing</i> ok	Aya <u>ate</u> apples.
(c) accomplishment		• have an endpoint ...in an hour ok		Aya <u>ate the apple</u> .
(d) achievement	• no duration		no <i>be+ing</i>	Aya <u>reached the summit</u> .

(12) Kindaichi (1950) classifies Japanese predicates in four groups, based on *-(r)u*, *-te+i-ru* forms

- *-(r)u* (relative) nonpast tense suffix
- *-te* gerund suffix; has same phonological alternations as *-ta* (“past”) suffix
- *i-* ‘exist, animate’ — also serves as an auxiliary verb with gerund (in which case subject need not be animate)

(13) Kindaichi’s classification system, and how it relates to the Vendler/Dowty system above (see Tsujimura 2007; also Ogihara chapter in Tsujimura (1999) *Handbook*)

	Stative	Continuative	Instantaneous	Type 4
	V/D State	V/D • Activity • Accompl.	V/D Achievement	(not in V/D system)
	ar-, hanas-e- ‘exist’, ‘can speak’	tabe-, yom- ‘eat’, ‘read’	sin-, kie- ‘die’, ‘extinguish’ (intr)	sugure-, sobie- ‘surpass’, ‘tower v’
-te-i- form	<i>can’t(?) appear in -te+i-form</i>	tabe-te+i-ru (a) ‘is eating’ (b) ‘has eaten’	sin-de+i-ru (a) * (b) ‘has died/is dead’	sugure-te+i-ru (a) * (b) ‘is outstanding’
-(r)u form	ar-u (a) ‘exists’ (b) ‘will exist’	tabe-ru (a) ‘(often) eats’ (b) ‘will eat’	sin-u (a) ‘(often) dies’ (b) ‘will die’	<i>can’t(?) appear in -ru form</i>

(14) Other attributes of aspect classes in Japanese: **Statives**

Statives (V, VN, A, AN, N)	Non-statives (V, VN)
Often assign nominative object	Do not assign nominative object
Are typically non-volitional • no imperatives/commands • no <i>-te ok-u</i> ‘do in advance’ form	May be volitional or non-volitional
Have a preference for an overt topic	Used both with and without overt topic

- Note: Some predicates allow both stative and non-stative uses

- (15) Other attributes of aspect classes in Japanese: **Achievements/Instantaneous predicates**
- Semantically, these often involve an instantaneous **change in state**
 - The same change in state is not necessarily expressed as an achievement predicate in English: compare *sin-u* ‘die’ (achievement) with English *die* (activity/accomp)
- (16) Ex: *sir-u*. Typically translated as ‘to know’, but aspectual properties not like Eng *know*
- (a) Sono koto-o sir-u. — means approx. ‘I will come to know that fact.’
that fact know-RU
- (b) Sono koto-o sit-te+i-ru. — usual way of expressing ‘I know that fact.’
that fact know-TE+I-RU
- (17) Now, look back at (13) and consider the usage of the *-te+i-(ru)* form in these classes
 There are two possible interpretations of the *-te+i-(ru)* construction:
- (a) progressive ‘is now Ving’
 (b) perfect / resultative ‘has (just) Ved; is now in a state resulting from having Ved’
- Which aspect classes allow which interpretation(s)? Why?
- (18) Consider ‘duration’ and ‘endpoint’: Can this help us understand the behavior of the predicate classes with respect to *-te+i-(ru)* forms? (see also McClure 1996 for another view)
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|--------------------|--------------|--|
| (a) State | ----- | (homogeneously spans an interval of time; has no intrinsic endpoint) |
| (b) Activity | ••••• | (iteration or continuation of activity can itself comprise a time span with no intrinsic endpoint) |
| (c) Accomplishment | ••••• | (has endpoint, which makes “resultant state” accessible) |
| (d) Achievement | | (occupies a single point in time; “resultant state” accessible) |
- (11) Achievement predicates are often used in the *-ta* form in relative clauses (Ogihara 1999)
- (a) Aya-wa [soko-no nuketa] oke-o mot-te+i-ru.
Aya bottom-GEN go.missing-TA pail hold-TE+I-RU
 ‘Aya has a pail that has no bottom.’
- Side note: GEN may appear instead of NOM on subjects in relative clauses.
- (b) Ken-wa [pro ai-ta] mado kara niged-as-u tumori da.
Ken open-TA window from escape-RU intention COPULA-RU
 ‘Ken intends to escape from [through] an open window.’
- (12) What is Kindaichi’s “Type 4”?
- One possibility: A “defective” subclass of another category — which one?

References and further reading

Comrie, Bernard (1976). *Aspect*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vendler, Zeno (1957). Verbs and times. *The Philosophical Review* 66:143-60.

Kindaichi, Haruhiko [金田一春彦] (1950). Kokugo doosi no itibunrui. *Gengo Kenkyuu* 15: 48-63.

Ogihara, Toshiyuki (1999). The semantics of tense and aspect in Japanese. In Natsuko Tsujimura (ed.), *The Handbook of Japanese Linguistics*, 326-348. Oxford: Blackwell.