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　**sinu**

    NJ:　sei aru mono-wa　　　kanarazu　sinu
        *life exist person-*TOP　　*certainly*　*die-_*　　　'Those who have lives will certainly die.'

(5)   谷に落ちて　　　死ぬる　もの　　多し
    CJ:　tani ni otite　　　**sinuru**　mono　　oposi

    NJ:　tani ni otite　　　sinu　　mono-ga　　ooi
        *gorge in fall-*CONT　*die-_*　　*person(-*NOM*)*　*numerous*
    'There are many people who fall into gorges and die.'

(6)   死ぬる　　は　　　安し
    CJ:　**sinuru**　pa　　yasusi

    NJ:　sinu　koto wa　　yasasii
        *die-_　(thing)-*TOP　*easy*　　　　'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: utukusii
　　　　beautiful-_
　　　　'It is beautiful.'

(10) 美しき　物
　　CJ: **utukusiki** mono

　　NJ: utukusii mono
　　　　beautiful-_ thing
　　　　'a beautiful thing'

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(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.