

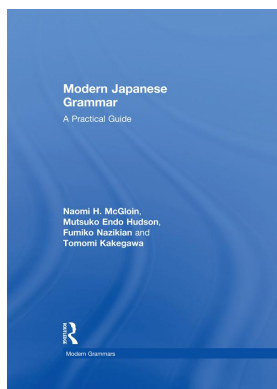
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Modern Japanese Grammar A Practical Guide

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Introduction: major features of Japanese grammar

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Part A

Structures



1

Introduction: major features of Japanese grammar

1.1

Basic word order

The basic word order of a Japanese sentence is *subject–predicate*. Japanese is therefore classified as a *verb-final language*. The ‘subject’ can be, and often is, absent, especially when its identity is clear from the context. The *predicate* may be a verb, an *i*-type adjective, or a *copula*. The copula is attached to a noun or a *na*-type adjective, and functions like the ‘be’ verb in English (e.g. ‘is,’ ‘are’). The main predicates are underlined in the examples in this section.

花子さんが来た。(verb)

Hanako-san ga kita.

Hanako came.

空が青い。(i-type adjective)

Sora ga aoi.

The sky is blue.

これが問題だ。(noun + copula)

Kore ga mondai da.

This is the problem.

地下鉄が便利だ。(na-type adj. + copula)

Chikatetsu ga benri da.

The subway is convenient.

When the predicate is a verb, the associated noun phrases, such as those representing time, location, partner, direct object (DO) and indirect object (IO), usually *precede* the verb. Some typical word orders are provided in (1)–(4). Any of the phrases appearing in parentheses need not be overtly expressed. A rule of thumb is that when a pronoun is used in English, nothing is used in Japanese.

- (1) (subject) (time) (location) verb ← ‘exist, be there, etc.’
 学生が教室にいる。
Gakusee ga kyooshitsu ni iru.
 There are students in the classroom.
- (2) (topic = subject) (time) (location) verb ← ‘come, go, return, etc.’
 私は来年ロンドンに行く。
Watashi wa rainen Rondon ni iku.
 I’ll go to London next year.
- (3) (topic = subject) (time) (partner) (location) (do) verb ← ‘do something’
 マリはケンと銀座ですしを食べた。
Mari wa Ken to Ginza de sushi o tabeta.
 Mari ate sushi with Ken in Ginza.

- (4) (topic = subject) (time) (IO) (do) verb ← ‘do something to someone’

ジョンは昨日リサにメールを送った。

Jon wa kinoo Risa ni meeru o okutta.

John sent an e-mail to Lisa yesterday.

The short words following the nouns in the above examples (**ga, wa, to, ni, de, o**) are called *particles*, and they indicate the grammatical relation of each noun to the verb. Noun phrases followed by these particles can be switched without affecting the meaning of the sentence, although the focus will likely be different. The example immediately above basically means the same as does the following, with the position of the time word and the indirect object switched.

ジョンはリサに昨日メールを送った。

Jon wa Risa ni kinoo meeru o okutta.

John sent an e-mail to Lisa yesterday.

To summarize, although the predicate usually appears at the end of a sentence, the order among noun phrases is relatively free.

▶ 5; 10

1.2 Modification pattern

The term *modify* means to ‘limit, qualify, give additional information,’ etc. in grammar. The ‘modifier’ always precedes the word it modifies in Japanese. Below, the words surrounded by brackets [] indicate a modifier. When a word modifies a noun, there are four patterns.

- (1) [noun] noun
[日本の] 山
[Nihon no] yama
[Japanese] mountain, mountain [in Japan]
- (2) [i-adjective] noun
[高い] 山
[takai] yama
[high] mountain
- (3) [na-adjective] noun
[きれいな] 山
[kiree na] yama
[beautiful] mountain
- (4) [clause] noun (A *clause* is a sentence within a sentence.)
[私が昨日見た] 山
[watashi ga kinoo mita] yama
mountain [that I saw yesterday]

The following are more examples of type (4).

[このアニメを作った] 人はだれですか。

[Kono anime o tsukutta] hito wa dare desu ka.

Who is the person [who made this *anime*]?

あれは [弟がよくやる] ゲームです。

Are wa [otooto ga yoku yaru] geemu desu.

That’s a game [that my younger brother often plays].

昨日は [駅前にある] 喫茶店で友達に会いました。

Kino wa [ekimae ni aru] kissaten de tomodachi ni aimashita.

Yesterday I met with my friend in the coffee shop [which is in front of the station].

▶ 7.2; 25

When a word modifies a verb, too, the modifier (an adverb) always precedes the verb.

▶ 14

あの人は [いつも] [ゆっくり] 話す。

Ano hito wa itsumo yukkuri hanasu.

He/she [always] speaks [slowly].

Sometimes, an adverb modifies a whole sentence, expressing the speaker's judgment of the event. In such cases, the adverb appears at the very beginning of the sentence.

[さいわい、] 雨は降らないでしょう。

[Saiwai,] ame wa furanai deshoo.

[Luckily,] it probably won't rain.

[おどろいたことに、] 答えを知っている人はいませんでした。

[Odoroita koto ni,] kotae o shitte iru hito wa imasen deshita.

[Surprisingly,] no one knew the answer.

Subordinate (adverbial) clauses expressing manner, time ('when, while'), condition ('if'), reason ('because'), concession ('although'), etc. precede the main clause.

▶ 22; 23; 24; 45

[立ったまま or 立って] そばを食べています。← manner

[Tatta mama or Tatte] soba o tabete imasu.

They are eating *soba* (buckwheat noodles) [while standing].

[ボーナスが出たら] 新しいスーツを買いたいんです。← condition

[Boonasu ga de-tara] atarashii suutsu o kaitai n desu.

[If there is a bonus,] I'd like to buy a new suit.

1.3 Particles

Particles are short functional words attached to an element within a sentence. Those that are attached to nouns are similar to *prepositions* in English (e.g. 'at,' 'in,' 'to,' 'by,' 'with') expressing such functions as time, location, direction, means, and partner. Unlike English prepositions, Japanese particles (also called *postpositions*) follow, instead of precede, the element with which they are associated. For example, **Nihon de** (Lit. Japan in) means 'in Japan.' Particles are classified into five types in this book. Some examples appear below.

Case particles: **ga** (subject), **o** (DO), **ni** (IO) 'to,' **no** (X's Y)

Postpositions: **de** 'at, in, by, with,' **ni** 'at, to, for,' **to** 'with,' **e** 'to,' **kara** 'from,' **made** 'until'

Adverbial particles: **wa** 'topic,' **mo** 'also,' **shika** 'only,' **dake** 'only,' **sae** 'even'

Conjunctive particles: **to** 'and,' **ba** 'if,' **to** 'if, when(ever),' **kara** 'because,' **ga** 'but,' **keredo(mo)** 'but,' **noni** 'although'

Sentence-final particles: **ne, yo, ka, wa, zo, ze, sa**

Case particles, postpositions, adverbial particles follow nouns and noun phrases. While case particles indicate the grammatical roles of nouns, such as subject (**ga**), direct object (**o**), and indirect object (**ni**), postpositions bear specific meanings. Conjunctive particles connect either nouns or clauses. Sentence-final particles appear at the end of a sentence and indicate the function of a sentence (e.g. question) and speaker attitudes (e.g. emphasis).

▶ 10; 22

1.4 Subject and topic

Subject and *topic* are quite different, and the distinction is made overtly in Japanese – by the use of the particles **ga** (subject) and **wa** (topic), respectively. The difference between **ga** and **wa** can sometimes be likened to that between an indefinite noun (e.g. ‘a man’) and a definite one (e.g. ‘the man’) in English.

A man came to see me yesterday. The man was wearing a black shirt.

In the first sentence, ‘a man’ is the subject, but not the topic of the sentence, since this person is being introduced into the discourse for the first time. ‘The man’ in the second sentence is both the subject and the topic of the sentence. Both the speaker and the hearer know who ‘the man’ refers to, and the sentence is about him. The following is the Japanese version of the same sentences.

きのう男の人がが会いにきました。その人は黒いシャツを着ていました。

Kinoo otoko no hito ga ai ni kimashita. Sono hito wa kuroi shatsu o kite imashita.

Broadly speaking, **ga** introduces new information and **wa** introduces shared (or ‘old’) information or an entity which is familiar to both the speaker and the hearer.

(a) 田中： あの人は何をしている人ですか。

Tanaka: Ano hito wa nani o shite iru hito desu ka.

What does he (= that person) do?

山田： あの人は医者です。

Yamada: Ano hito wa isha desu.

He (= that person) is a doctor.

(b) 田中： どの人が医者ですか。

Tanaka: Dono hito ga isha desu ka.

Which one is the doctor?

山田： あの人が医者です。

Ano hito ga isha desu.

That person is the doctor.

The noun marked by **ga** is the subject of the sentence, while that marked by **wa** is the topic of the sentence. In (a), Tanaka and Yamada are talking about a certain person (i.e. ‘that person,’ who is perhaps in the same room). Tanaka asks what he does, and Yamada answers that he is a doctor, using **wa**. In (b), on the other hand, Tanaka might be at the hospital, looking for a doctor. Seeing there are several people around, he asks which one is the doctor. Yamada then points to one person and says that ‘that person is the doctor.’ Here, **ga** is used.

A topic most often expresses the subject at the same time, but it can have any number of functions; e.g. direct object, indirect object, time, location, partner. For a detailed description of ‘topic’, see 11.

▶ 10.1; 11

1.5 ‘Agglutinative’ morphology

To express tenses (nonpast and past), moods and voices, such as negative (‘not’), potential (‘can do’), desiderative (‘want to do’), causative (‘make someone do’), and passive (e.g. ‘was done something to’), the verbal root is followed by a suffix, which in turn is followed by another. The order of these suffixes is generally fixed, with the tense morpheme appearing at or near the end of the sentence.

Verbal root – potential – negative – tense

Verbal root – causative – passive – desiderative – negative – tense

読ませた

yom-ase-ta (V-causative-past)

made (someone) read

食べられる

tabe-rare-ru (V-potential-nonpast OR V-passive-nonpast)
can eat OR be eaten

行かせられたくない

ik-ase-rare-taku-na-i (V-causative-passive-desiderative-negative-nonpast)
don't want to be made to go

The negative **-na-i** and desiderative **-ta-i** are conjugated in the same manner as **i**-type adjectives, while the potential **-(rar)e-ru**, causative **-(s)ase-ru**, and passive **-(r)are-ru** morphemes are conjugated like a verb.

▶ 12.6; 15; 20; 21; 27; 63.1

1.6

Ellipsis

The general rule in Japanese is that, other than the main predicate (verb, **i**-adjective, copula¹), whatever element the speaker assumes is 'obvious' in the context can be absent (or omitted). This phenomenon is called 'ellipsis,' and is widespread. The absent phrases may be the subject, direct and indirect object, time, location, means, partner, and the like. The particle associated with an absent noun must also be absent. In the examples below, the phrases in parentheses in the English equivalents are absent in Japanese.

NOTE ¹The copula can be omitted in casual speech.

A: 宿題は Ø したの?

Shukudai wa Ø shita no?

Did (you) do the homework?

B: Ø Ø もうやったよ。

Ø Ø **Moo yatta yo.**

(I) did (it) already.

It is clear from the context that the identity of the missing subject in A's question is 'you,' while it is 'I' in B's response, and that the missing direct object is 'it,' that is, 'homework.'

Particles such as **wa** and **o** are often omitted in conversation, especially of a casual type. **Ga** and **ni**, too, are sometimes omitted. This is because these particles express *functions*, such as topic, direct object, subject, and indirect object, respectively, rather than *meanings*. On the other hand, the particles classified as 'postpositions,' such as **de** 'at, in (place),' **ni** 'at, in (time),' **to** 'with,' and **kara** 'from,' do express meanings and, therefore, cannot be omitted.

Formal speech:

これ Ø (← は) お気に召すかどうか分かりませんが...

Kore Ø (← wa) o-ki ni mesu ka doo ka wakarimasen ga...

I hope you'll like this. (Lit. I don't know whether you'll like this or not, but...)

私 Ø (← は) 鈴木と申します。本日はお電話 Ø (← を) 戴きましてありがとうございます。

Watakushi Ø (← wa) Suzuki to mooshimasu. Honjitsu wa o-denwa Ø (← o) itadakimashite arigatoo gozaimashita.

My name is Suzuki (Lit. I humbly call myself Suzuki). Thank you very much for your telephone call today.

Casual speech:

お兄さん Ø (← は) もう帰ってきた?

Oniisan Ø (← wa) moo kaette kita?

Did/Has your brother come back yet?

今雨 Ø (← が) 降ってる？

Ima ame Ø (← ga) futte ru?

Is it raining right now?

私 Ø (← は) きのうアパートで友達と晩ご飯 Ø (← を) 食べてたんだけどー。

Atashi Ø (← wa) kinoo apaato de tomodachi to bangohan Ø (← o) tabete ta n da kedoo.

I was having dinner with my friend in my apartment yesterday, and . . .

▶ 31.14