

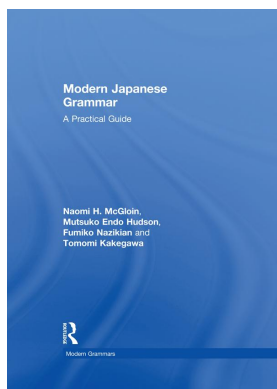
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Nouns and noun phrases

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7

Nouns and noun phrases

7.1 Types of nouns

7.1.1 Common and proper nouns

In Japanese a noun is not accompanied by articles such as ‘a’ and ‘the,’ and generally there is no distinction between a singular and a plural form. **Hon**, for example, can be ‘a book,’ ‘the book,’ ‘books,’ or ‘the books.’ Japanese nouns, moreover, are not marked for gender as are in many European languages.

Some specific nouns denoting people and personal pronouns can take the plural suffix **-tachi**; **kono hito** ‘this person,’ **kono hito-tachi** ‘these people,’ **watashi** ‘I,’ **watashi-tachi** ‘we.’ The use of **-tachi** has expanded greatly in recent years so that even animals and objects may take the suffix if the speaker/writer strongly empathizes with them; e.g. **hana-tachi** ‘(the/my important) flowers.’

▶ 8.1

子供たち	kodomo-tachi	the children
男たち	otoko-tachi	the men
田中さんたち	Tanakasan-tachi	Tanaka and others

There is also no orthographic distinction between common and proper nouns since Japanese scripts do not have capitalization.

7.1.2 Verbal nouns

Verbal nouns are nouns that can also function as a verb when combined with the verb **suru** ‘to do.’ In the following sentence, **benkyoo** ‘study’ is a noun.

日本語の勉強は楽しい。

Nihongo no benkyoo wa tanoshii.

The study of Japanese is fun.

In the following, **benkyoo suru** is a verb.

みんな来年も日本語を勉強するでしょう。

Minna rainen mo Nihongo o benkyoo suru deshoo.

Everyone will probably study Japanese next year.

As a noun, **benkyoo** can take a particle and it can be modified just like any other nouns. As a verb, it can take an object noun phrase. It is ungrammatical to have two noun phrases marked with **o** (direct object) in the same clause. One cannot therefore say ***Nihongo o benkyoo o suru**. Instead, one must say **Nihongo no benkyoo o suru** or **Nihongo o benkyoo suru**.

Many of the verbal nouns are of Sino-Japanese origin, such as **kenkyuu** ‘research,’ **ryokoo** ‘trip,’ and **kekkon** ‘marriage.’ Verbs borrowed from English and other languages are used as verbal nouns with the verb **suru** ‘to do’; e.g. **deeto suru** ‘to date,’ **kisu suru** ‘to kiss,’ **chekku suru** ‘to check.’

7.1.3

Formal nouns

Formal nouns are nouns that are used not for their lexical meanings but to serve various grammatical and pragmatic functions. They are always modified by a clause. For example, **tokoro** as a regular noun means ‘place,’ but as a formal noun, it is used to indicate temporal relations. Other frequently used formal nouns include **koto**, **no**, **mono**, and **wake**.

▶ 18; 23.3; 26.1

今食べたところです。

Ima tabeta tokoro desu.

I just ate / I’ve just eaten.

スミスさんが日本へ行ったことを知っていますか。

Sumisu-san ga Nihon e itta koto o shitte imasu ka.

Do you know that Mr/Ms Smith went to Japan?

子供の時はよく外で遊んだものです。

Kodomo no toki wa yoku soto de asonda mono desu.

I used to play outside a lot when I was a child.

日本に住んでいたから、日本語が上手なわけです。

Nihon ni sunde ita kara, Nihongo ga joozu na wake desu.

(He) lived in Japan, so it is natural that his Japanese is good.

7.2

Noun modification

7.2.1

Noun *no* noun

When a noun is used to modify another noun, **no** is used.

先生の本

sensee no hon

teacher’s book

In **sensee no hon**, the relationship between the two nouns is that of possessor–possessed. Another common relationship between the two nouns is apposition – that is, the first noun describes an attribute of the second noun.

大学生のむすこ

daigakusee no musuko

(my) son, who is a college student

Any number of nouns can be connected by **no** as long as it makes sense.

大学生のむすこのアメリカ人の友達

Daigakusee no musuko no Amerikajin no tomodachi

an American friend of (my) son, who is a college student

大学の近くの喫茶店のコーヒーの味

daigaku no chikaku no kissaten no koohii no aji

the taste of the coffee of the coffee shop that is near the university

▶ 1.2; 10.1.4

7.2.2

Adjective + noun

Nouns can be modified by adjectives in their pre-nominal forms. For details, see 13.1.2, 13.2.2, and 13.4.

7.2.3 Clause (relative clause) + noun

A noun can be modified by a clause, which comes before the noun. The predicate is in the plain form. The particle **wa** expressing topic cannot appear in a noun-modifying clause, though it can appear to express contrast. The subject within the clause is therefore marked by **ga**. (See 25 for details)

[田中さんが読んだ] 本

[Tanaka-san ga yonda] hon
the book [Mr/Ms Tanaka read]

[この本を書いた] 人

[kono hon o kaita] hito
the person [who wrote this book]

7.2.4 Pre-nouns + noun

There are a limited number of words called ‘pre-nouns.’ They only appear as a modifier of a noun and do not conjugate. The examples include **kono/sono/ano/dono** ‘this/that/that over there/which,’ **konna/sonna/anna/donna** ‘this kind of/that kind of/what kind of,’ **aru** ‘a certain,’ **ironna** ‘various,’ **iwayuru** ‘so-called,’ **ookina** ‘big,’ and **chiisana** ‘small.’

▶ 9

この人

kono hito
this person

ある人

aru hito
a certain person

大きな家

ookina ie
a big house

いろんな所

ironna tokoro
various places

7.2.5 *to yuu* noun

To yuu modifies a noun and provides information which identifies or explains the noun that follows. N **to yuu** N, for example, is used to identify the name of a person, place or thing.

「たんぽぽ」という映画

‘Tanpopo’ to yuu eega
a movie called Tampopo

黒沢明という映画監督

Kurosawa Akira to yuu eega kantoku
a movie director called Akira Kurosawa

To yuu can also follow a clause. In [clause **to yuu** N], the clause introduces the content of the following noun, which tends to be related to communications (e.g. **hanashi** ‘story,’ **uwasa** ‘rumor,’ **hookoku** ‘report,’ **shirase** ‘notification,’ **nyuusu** ‘news,’ **denwa** ‘telephone (call),’ and **tegami** ‘letter’) and human emotions (**ki** ‘feeling,’ **kimochi** ‘feeling,’ **kanji** ‘feeling,’ **osore** ‘fear,’ and **yorokobi** ‘joy’).

みんな無事だという知らせがあった。

Minna buji da to yuu shirase ga atta.
We got notification that everyone was safe.

桜が満開だというニュースを聞いた。

Sakura ga mankai da to yuu nyusu o kiita.

I heard the news that the cherry blossoms were in full bloom.

やっと全てが終わったという気がする。

Yatto subete ga owatta to yuu ki ga suru.

Finally I have the feeling that everything is over.

いつかまた会えるという感じがした。

Itsu ka mata aeru to yuu kanji ga shita.

I had the feeling that I would be able to see (him/her) again.

7.3

Noun and/or noun

Two or more nouns can be listed by the conjunctive particles **to** ‘and,’ **ya** ‘and,’ **ni** ‘and,’ **toka** ‘things like,’ and **nari** ‘things like.’

- (1) デパチカでお弁当とケーキを買いました。

Depachika de obentoo to keeki o kaimashita.

In the basement of the department store, I bought a boxed lunch and a cake.

- (2) テレビでドラマやアニメを見ます。

Terebi de dorama ya anime o mimasu.

I watch drama and anime (and other things) on TV.

While **to** is used to list items exhaustively, **ya** gives only a partial list. In (1), for example, what I bought were two things – a boxed lunch and a cake. In (2), on the other hand, drama and anime are just two of the things (I) watch on TV.

手みやげには、食べ物とか飲み物がいいでしょう。

Temiyage ni wa, tabemono toka nomimono ga ii deshoo.

It's good to take things like food and drink as a gift.

Disjunction of nouns can be expressed by **N ka N** or **N nari N**.

食事はビーフかチキンを選んでください。

Shokuji wa biifu ka chikin o erande kudasai.

Please choose either beef or chicken for your meal.

困った時は、両親なり先生に相談したらどうですか。

Komatta toki wa, ryooshin nari sensee ni soodan shitara doo desu ka.

When you are in trouble, you should talk to people like your parents or your teacher.