A Study of Proposition and Modality
Focusing on Epistemic Modals
in the Japanese Language

Kazuyuki Matsushita

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Declaration

Except where it is otherwise acknowledged in the text,
this thesis is entirely my own work

Kazuyuki Matsushita

March, 2006
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Kazuyuki Matsushita
Abstract

This study discusses proposition and modality in the Japanese language, focusing on epistemic modals.

In the literature of modality recently, detailed discussions of individual modals have been made to clarify their function. However, clear definitions of proposition and modality have not yet been adequately provided. The issue about whether morphemes such as *ta* (tense/aspect) and *masu* (honorific) belong to the modality part has not yet been clarified, and the issue of clarification of the difference between the similar modals *yōda* and *rashii* remains unclear. Hence, the first main question concerns whether the sentence consists of proposition and modality (including the classification of modality). The second is how epistemic modals function (whether they express subjectivity or objectivity, and how different similar modals are). In addressing these questions, the study analyses actual examples used in novels and critical essays by use of the phrase-additional and the modal-substitutional methods. Modals used at the end of a sentence are focused on, so modality-expressions appearing at the beginning and in the middle of a sentence are excluded from the subject of this study.

This study starts with newly proposing definitions of proposition and modality to distinguish between the two, integrating the following two views: Lyons (1995)’s approach of truth-value from the logical viewpoint, and Japanese scholars such as Teramura’s (1982) approach from the viewpoint of objectivity. By way of the definitions proposed here, the phrasal-discriminator between proposition and modality is established. Consequently, it is shown that any sentence expresses both proposition and modality, and that the copula *da/dearu*, the polite forms *masu* and the desiderative *tai* are propositional parts. Moreover, the new classification of modality is set up from the viewpoint of orientation into three categories: proposition-oriented, situation-oriented, and listener-oriented modality. Thereby, the modality of any sentence can be located in one of the three categories of this classification. This is supported by exploration of the various usages of *-ta* in chapter 3.
In the latter half, in examining similar modals, *nodarō* and *darō*, this study has found that *nodarō* expresses the interpretation of the specific situation, and *darō* the utterer’s soft claim, and it newly categorises the relationship between judgement and situation in the *nodarō* sentence. As well, this study has clarified the difference between *yōda* and *rashii*, by introducing the concept of ‘inside or outside the utterer’s perceptible domain’.

The outcome of this study will contribute to a better and more precise understanding of modality in the Japanese language. In particular, the definitions of proposition and modality and the method of distinguishing them can also be applied to modality-expressions appearing at the beginning and in the middle of a sentence.
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Conventions of Transcription

Romanisation

Romanisation in this thesis follows the Hepburn system. For example:

ああ aa → ā,
うう uu → ū,
おう ou → ō,
いう iu (or yuu) → yū,
しゃ sha,
しゅ shu,
しょ sho,
ちゃ cha,
ちゅ chu,
ちょ cho.

Abbreviations

ACC   accusative case
NOM   nominative case
PROP  proposition
MOD   modality
SFP   sentence final particle

Marks indicating of whether the example is appropriate

The marks ‘φ, * and #’ in front of examples indicate the appropriateness of example expressions, as follows:

*X…X is not acceptable. This is a case in which it is unnatural or ungrammatical.
#X…X sounds unnatural, even if it is grammatically correct. In this case X is not appropriate in the context, although in a certain context it might be acceptable.
X…no mark ‘φ’ means that X sounds natural and is grammatically correct. It indicates appropriateness and acceptability.

Sources of examples

The expression in the Japanese language is given in italics. The sources of examples are shown in parentheses. Unless otherwise noted, all translations and examples are mine.
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