

Inflection in Japanese. Descriptions versus language facts

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Ambiguity of basic notions and its pre-linguistic character are inevitable shortcomings of the two-centuries-old morphological typology of languages ascribed to von Humboldt. Still, agglutination is clearly a sub-type of inflecting (paradigmatic) phenomena (Humboldt 1988: 107). In general, inflectional (fusional in contemporary terms), agglutinating/agglutinative and hybrid language types exist (Bańko 2012: 48-49). Below, an example from the predominantly agglutinative Japanese is described.

<u>Inu-o</u>	<u>kat-te</u>	<u>i-mas-u.</u>	'[I] have a dog.'
dog-ACC	keep-CON	PRG(AV)-POL-NPST	

Synthetic word forms (*inu-o*, *kat-te*, *i-mas-u*) are morpheme strings, also in analytic constructions.

Lexical stems (inflectional themes) (*inu-*, *kat-*, *i-*) connect grammatical markers (*-o*, *-te*, *-mas-*, *-u*).

Mostly uni-functional markers do not accumulate grammatical functions (Huszcza et al. 1998: 193).

Word units (dictionary entries) are linked to finite, systemic sets of word forms (paradigms).

On the contrary, in contemporary English, (residual) inflectional forms, of not more than one grammatical marker, reveal low functional load, with rare complex derivational forms (Hockett 1958: 179-180, Lyons 1977: 377). In general sources, there is even a presumption that inflection is “a paradigm [...] to memorize” while learning Latin at school (Butt 2006: 2).

Agglutination (systemic, paradigmatic) in Japanese is described as “affixation”, identified with derivation (non-systemic) (Shibatani 1990: 215-221), or as “gluing” the (amorphous) units of meaning (Hasegawa 2018: 3-4). The traditional Japanese concept is “adding a meaning” to “a word” (Hashimoto 1948: 34).

Lexical “words” are further identified with (borrowed) units of script, rendering the (isolating, analytic) properties of Chinese languages (marginal in Japanese). Systemic inflection is thus overlooked, even if the “paradigm” is overtly mentioned (Bloch 1970: 2, Tanaka et al. 1988: 460).

Other authors define inflection as “changing a part of a word” and agglutination as “attaching affix[es]” (Takahashi 2004: 278-279). This leads, at best, to enumeration of open set(s) of modifiers, described as separate lexical units, with basics of morphological approach contravened in a variety of ways. Contemporary claims against inflection, associated with the illusionary “desire to have a normative, regular grammar” (Frellesvig 2010: 410-411), do not significantly differ from descriptions of markers as showing “subjective emotions and feelings” (Tokieda 1941: 231-232).

It may be declared that a coherent morphological description of Japanese does not exist yet. Prerequisites for it are sketched in the presentation.

GLOSSES

ACC – accusative, AV – auxiliary verb, CON – connecting, NPST – non-past, POL – polite, PRG – progressive

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