

Factors leading to the creation of periphrastic modality expressions in Japanese: With particular attention to the main clause-subordinate clause continuum

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Until the Middle Ages, many of the Japanese modality expressions could express both deontic and epistemic modal meanings (Horie 1997). For example, *-mu* had a deontic meaning of intention and an epistemic meaning of probability, whereas *-beshi* had a deontic meaning of obligation and an epistemic meaning of certainty.

However, this form-meaning correspondence of modality expressions underwent a radical change in the early Modern period (around the 17th century) when the synthetic modality expressions of Old Japanese were replaced by periphrastic modality expressions such as *nakere-ba-nara-nai* (obligation) and *kamo-shire-nai* (weak possibility) (Moriya and Horie 2009). Deontic modality expressions and epistemic modality expressions thus became differentiated.

In this presentation, we argue that the development of such periphrastic modality expressions involves “insubordination” (Evans 2007), in which subordinate clauses come to function like main clauses. In Japanese, the boundaries between main clauses and subordinate clauses are less distinct than in other languages, say Standard European languages. This is reflected in the fact that in Japanese, not only a main clause can be embedded within a subordinate clause, as in (1), but also a subordinate clause can readily become a main clause, as in (2):

(1) “*Densha-ga kuru-zo!*” *to-iu sakebi*
Train-NOM come-Assertive COMP-say shouting
“(someone’s) voice shouting “Here comes the train!”

(2) *Tonikaku hayaku neru-koto.*
anyway early go to sleep-NOML
“You should go to sleep anyway.”

In (2) *koto* is a noun originally meaning “event, matter” modified by the subordinate clause *tonikaku hayaku neru* (“going to sleep anyway”). It literally means “the matter of going to sleep anyway”. However, *koto* in (2) in fact functions as a sentence final deontic modality marker and the preceding subordinate clause is reanalyzed as main clause expressing command (Horie 2011).

We will first show that the boundary between a main clause and a subordinate clause in Japanese is not clear-cut, and then demonstrate that the process of turning a subordinate clause into a main

clause was involved in the development of periphrastic modality expressions in the early Modern period. The main clause-subordinate clause continuum has thus played an important role in developing new forms of modal auxiliaries which contribute to disambiguating modal auxiliaries in Modern Japanese.

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