WHAT IS AT THE BOTTOM OF THE JAPANESE LANGUAGE?

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I. Preliminaries

Modern linguistics often forgets much too fast that there is more to the study of language than just 'description' of linguistic phenomena. The science of language as a 'Geisteswissenschaft' is interested also in what is behind the formal and semantic facts of a language. It searches for the causes of the structural and semantic peculiarities of a language and what they represent in relation to the mind and 'Weltbild' of the particular language community.[1]

Languages do not reflect things and conditions as such but the way in which human beings look at them. Geographical, historical, and sociological factors have led to the birth of different speech-communities. They have determined the manner in which the members of a given speech-community have converted the world into their intellectual property; and this process is reflected in their language.

In this paper we shall try to focus on a few aspects of the Japanese language which we consider significant in the light of what we said above. However, it should be noted that, for the moment, we may not always be able to make proper inferences from the structural peculiarities mentioned here. In such cases we content ourselves with pointing them out and leaving further and more proper interpretation to the specialists in other fields.

II. The "depth" of the structure of Japanese

The learner of Japanese soon becomes aware of what to him seems "strange" in Japanese syntax. Thus he will find a word-order

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[1] Cf. Leo Weisgerber: "Von den Kraften der deutschen Sprache": Vol. 1: "Die Sprache unter den Kraften des menschlichen Daseins" Düsseldorf, 1953; vol. 2: "Vom Weltbild der deutschen Sprache", Düsseldorf, 1953: vol. 3: "Die Muttersprache im Aufbau unserer Kultur", Düsseldorf, 1957; vol. 4: "Die geschichtliche Kraft der deutschen Sprache" Düsseldorf, 1960 (latest edition).

in Japanese that is quite different from what he is used to finding in most European languages. This difference in word-order may be considered from the point of view of Yngve's depth hypothesis.[2] Yngve, through his research in mechanical translation, discovered two types of structures: *progressive* and *regressive*.

a) *Progressive structures*

Figure 1 illustrates the tree of the sentence "The man who came yesterday was my friend" diagrammed on the basis of an immediate-constituent grammar. In expanding the two main branches from NF_{a2} and VF_{b2} we see that the expansion mechanism works in such a way that only one constituent has to be stored in the temporary memory in each step, for the right constituent stored in it is taken out again for further expansion immediately after its corresponding left constituent has been expanded. Such a type of structure is called progressive, for the expansion works to the right. A progressive structure may be expanded almost indefinitely.

b) *Regressive structures*

Figure 2 represents a diagram of the Japanese translation of the English sentence. In this diagram we see that the two main branches of the tree expand from NP_{a2} and VF_{b2} to the left. In this system the expansion device has first to move down the stem to expand each node and then move back up and complete each branch. Therefore, for each step down, an additional constituent must be stored in the temporary memory. This maximum amount of temporary storage of constituents is called the "depth" of the construction. This depth is numerically calculated in the following way: Starting from the right, the branches parting from each node are numbered from 0 to n, and the numbers written along the branches that lead to the corresponding terminal constituent. (In Fig. 1 & 2 the depth of each terminal constituent is indicated in parenthesis.)

Regressive structures have a limited depth, i.e. the expansion to the left, contrary to expansion to the right, is restricted. This is in accordance with certain psychological findings maintaining that the span of temporary memory is restricted.

Comparing the two diagrams we find that the Japanese struc-
ture is of greater depth than its English equivalent.

It happens that in Japanese sentences of greater depth are
much more frequent than in European languages.[3]   A tentative
conclusion of this is that the Japanese individual's temporary me-
mory is much more involved in language use than is the case with
Europeans.   This may have certain psychological implications in fa-
vor of the Japanese's intellectual capacity.   A more concrete appre-
ciation of this point, however, must be left up to the phychologists.

III.   "INTERPRETATIVE" VERSUS "CONTEMPLATIVE"

Many Japanese sentences do not have a personal subject.   The
sentence "Pan ga arimasu" may mean "I, you, etc. have bread", but
also "There is bread".   It is not important to know *who* has bread
but just to state that (the) bread is present.   When the Japanese
says "Onaka ga suita" (meaning literally "The stomach has become
empty" = "I am hungry") he again avoids to express *whose*
stomach has become empty or *who* is hungry.

Westerners are always tempted to take a more interpretative
attitude towards the world whilst the Japanese mentality is more
contemplative.   The Japanese observe and "refer", the Westerners
analyze, i.e. make clear distinctions between "personal subject" and
"object."

This is also expressed in more uniform intonation patterns and
a less marked stress in Japanese.

IV.   "PERSONALISTIC" VERSUS "COLLECTIVISTIC"

The contrast between "interpretative" and "contemplative" maps
with "personalistic" versus "collectivistic."   There is still another
feature in Japanese which emphasizes the subordination of the in-
dividual to the collectivity.   Thus we find that certain words clearly
express this phenomenon: The English verb "give" has three basic-
ally different equivalents in Japanese: "ageru" "kudasaru" and
"yaru".   "Aegru" means literally "to hand up"— this is also ex-
pressed by a character meaning active motion upwards and is used
whenever the first person refers to his act of giving directed to
the second or the third person towards himself and finally "yaru".

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[3] E. Zierer: "Eine vergleichende Studie zur Yngve's Tiefenhypothse" to
be published in *Statistical Methods In Linguistics*, Stockholm.

is used when referring to the act of giving done by one person of a higher social status to one of an inferior status. There is no doubt that the traditional Japanese feudal system has left its traces in the structure of the Japanese vocabulary.

The Japanese family is considered to be highly integrated. In Japanese culture as well as in daily life we find that the individual is always subordinated to the collectivity. Thus in the Noh theater, but also in the Kabuki, masks, special make-up and strictly pre-described behavior of the actors reduce their personality to a minimum. The Ukeyoe or woodblock-print is produced by three artists—the designer, the engraver and the printer—in harmonious team-works. In the Japanese puppet theatre Bunraku three puppeteers handle one puppet.

The typical Japanese house is of such a design that it hardly disposes of any room for private talks: There are no secrets in a Japanese family. It is very frequent to communicate on post-cards matter which to Westerners seem "strictly confidential".

This spirit of collectivism may be one of the main reasons why Japan has progressed to the stage of becoming an economic world-power as she is today.

V. Words to designate family relationships in Japanese

Another interesting phenomenon of Japanese is the way which the family hierarchy is expressed in the words designating family relationships. Figure 3 shows that Japanese is more specific with respect to the relations among the members of a family. In other words, the structure of a family is envisaged by the Japanese in a different way than in English. To express the social hierarchy reigning in the Japanese family the language has provided special words emphasizing the distinctions.

VI. The world of the Kanjis

It seems that there are not many Westeners who speak Japanese; but it is certain that there are much less who have mastered written Japanese. This is due to the heavy burdening of the memory involved in learning the Chinese characters. These characters —the kanji—are a fascinating world of their own. There was a time in Japan when a strong movement was propagating the replacement of the Kanji by the Latin alphabet—the socalled Romaji-kai.

In recent years "advice" stemming from Western countries insists on the elimination of the characters from Japanese writing. We believe that such a step would not only be unwise but even very destructive to Japanese culture for a variety of reasons of which we bring forth here only the following:

a) The process of learning the Chinese ideograms helps to develop the child's mind. Thus from simple pictograms representing concrete objects he advances to forming new concepts by combining ideas. There is no doubt that this combining of ideas to form new ones means an extraordinary training of the child's mind. Moreover, the child with an able teacher can, so to say, participate in ordering intellectually life and the world in the way the Chinese did several thousand years ago. For the sake of illustration we give the following examples:[4]

Out of the pictogram representing	*developed the ideogram*
"hand holding a whip"	"father"
"knife over a heart"	"suffering"
"rain over a hand"	"snow"
"aged person with a stick and a child"	"filial love"

The ideograms representing	*combined stand for the following idea:*
"loyalty" — "communication"	"confession"
"teaching" — "meeting"	"church"
"equality" — "feeling"	"sympathy"
"mother" — "child"	"love"
"effort" — "strong"	"study"
"heart" — "reason'"	"psychology"

The learning of the characters means also the training of the child's talent for observation and memory.

b) It is interesting to notice that in Japanese there is only one word for "to write" and "to paint": "kaku". In fact, writing for the Japanese is not only an activity done for the sake of transmitting information but also an aesthetic expressive movement. The Japanese write for the mere pleasure of writing. Many times the contents to be transmitted are only the pretext. Calligraphic ex-

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4 Examples were taken from: Oreste & Enko Vaccari: *Pictorial Chinese-Japanese Characters, Tokyo,* Charles E. Tuttle, 1964.

hibitions are very common all over Japan. Learning Chinese characters develops in the child an aesthetic feeling.

c) The process of reading Chinese characters is completely different from that of the comprehension of a text written in phonemic graphemes: When reading a Kanji in the mind of the Reader arises at first the meaning and then the acoustic image while when reading a phonemic text the acoustic image elicits the meaning. This must have certain psycholinguistic implications worthy of detailed study by psychologists.

d) Japanese is very rich in homonyms. This inconvenience, however, is reduced by the fact that different characters correspond to them.

e) Since each Kanji has one or more pronunciations of Chinese origin and one or more of Japanese origin the student acquires a vision of the structure and the etymological growth of the lexicon. There are at present 1850 official Kanji. Fortunately there is no intention among educational authorities to replace the Kanji with the Roman alphabet or Kana symbols. On the contrary, it may well be possible that the official number be increased.

VII. OUTLOOK

Applied linguistics is not only descriptive linguistics. It is also to be understood as an effort to comprehend the interrelationship between a language and the cultural patterns and mentality of its native speakers.

Language is a very strong force. This ought to be taken into consideration by those who are "planning language policies". There is a very fundamental right of every human being: the right to his mother tongue. Imposing a language upon another causes problems sooner or later. Most of the young nations in Asia are facing this language problem; they must select one or more national languages. In this language policy truly humanistically orientated linguistics should play an important role.

Figure 1
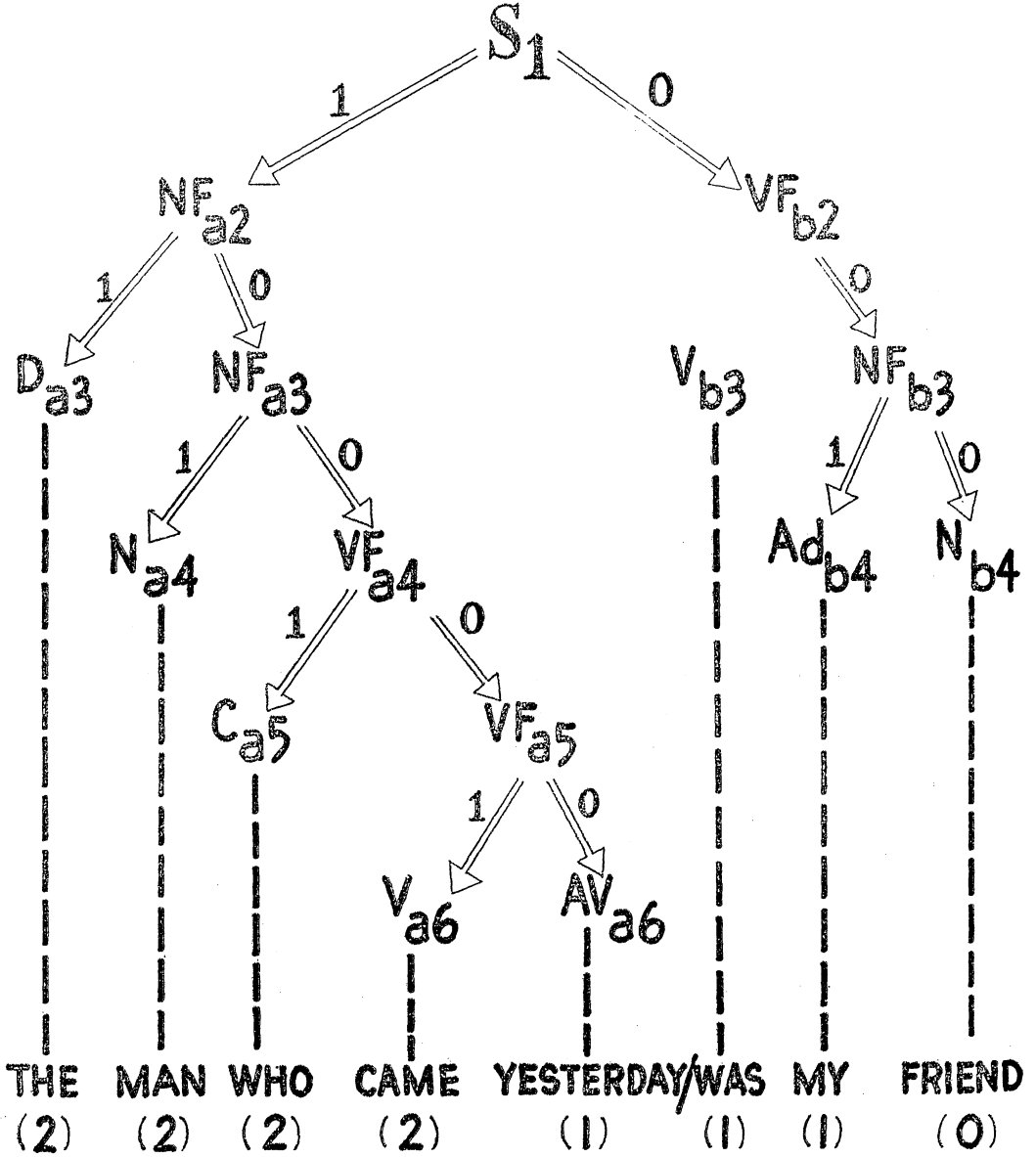"The Man Who Came Yesterday Was My Friend."
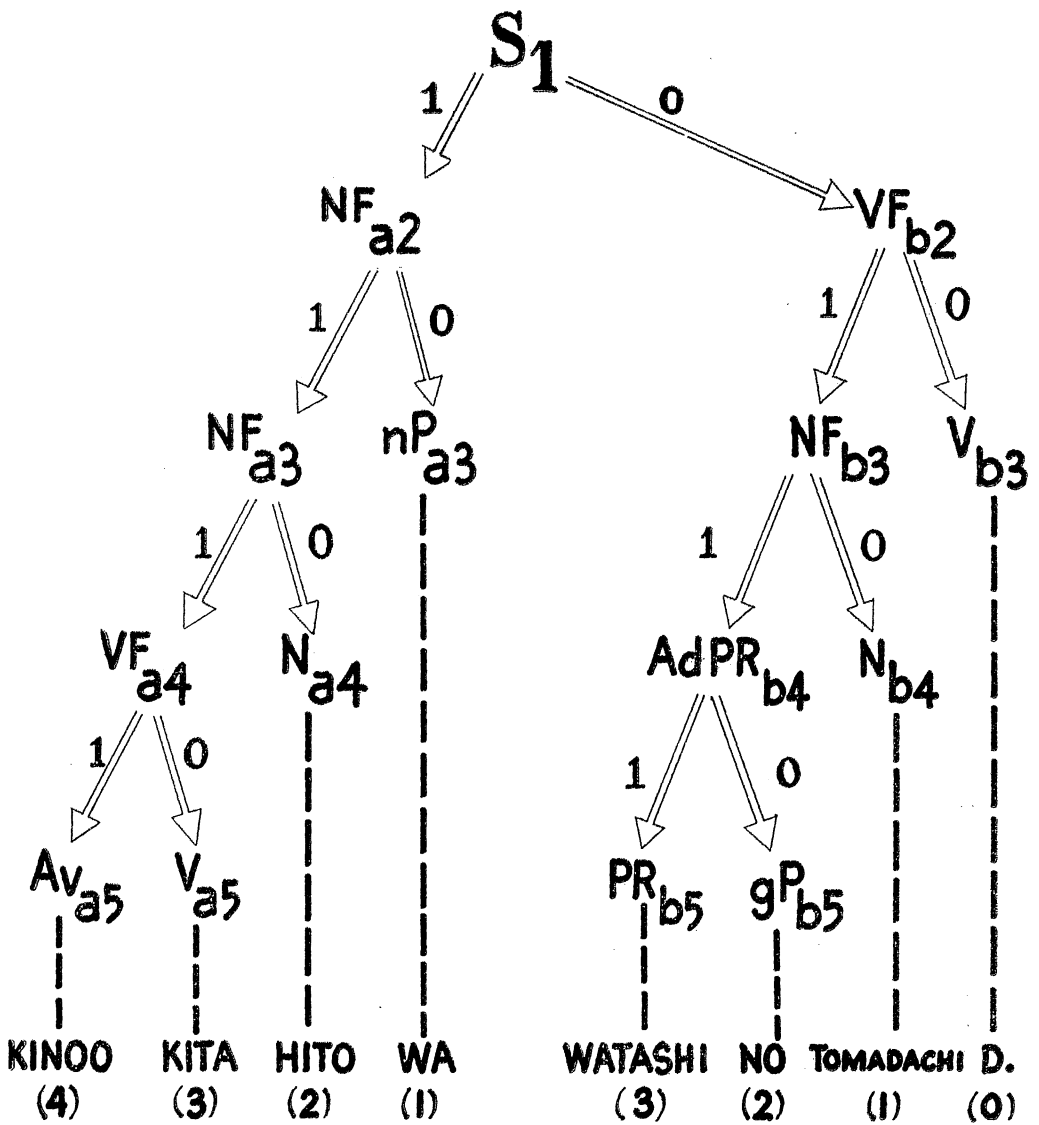
Figure 2
Japanese Translation of English Sentence in Figure 1

Figure 3
Family Relationships in Japanese

MY ————————— CHICHI
   FATHER
YOUR, ——————— OTOOSAN
HIS,
etc.

MY ————————— HAHA
   MOTHER
YOUR, ——————— OKASAN
HIS,
etc.

MY —————— TSUMA,KANAI
   WIFE
YOUR, ——UKUSAN,OKUSAMA
HIS,
etc.

MY —————— TAKU,SHUJIN
   HUSBAND
YOUR, —— OTAKU,GOSHUJIN
HIS,
etc.

MY ————————— MASUKO
   SON
YOUR, ———— MASUKOSAN
HIS,
etc.

MY —————— MUSUME
   DAUGHTER
YOUR, ————— OJOOSAN
HIS,
etc.

ELDER —————— NIISAN
   BROTHER
YOUNGER ———— OTOOTO

ELDER —————— NEESAN
   SISTER
YOUNGER ——— IMOOTO

ELDEST ———— CHOONAN
   SON
YOUNGEST ————— SUEKO

ELDEST ———— CHOOJO
   DAUGHTER
YOUNGEST——SUEMUSUME