EMOTIONS, PERCEPTIONS AND DESIRES
OF A THIRD PERSON:
AN ETHNOGRAMMATICAL STUDY OF
THE -GARU STRUCTURE IN JAPANESE

Misuzu SHIMOTORI

Abstract: Japanese suffix –garu is combined with mental verbs/adjectives and this structural pattern expresses a third person’s physical or psychological representations from the speaker’s observational viewpoint. In the field of ethnogrammar it is of interest to discuss cultural constrains on the grammar of a language. The purpose of the present paper is to study the structural pattern of the Japanese suffix -garu from an ethnogrammatical perspective. I am going to discuss what types of cultural aspects the construction of -garu suffix is relating to, and what the relation is based on.

Key words: Ethnogrammar, Culture, Japanese suffix, Emotions, Perceptions

1. Introduction

We use language every day. It is used in various forms, such as speaking, writing, reading and even signing, depending on our circumstances or preferences. In *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition*, Wierzbicka (1992:3) clearly states that “language is a tool for expressing meaning”. In this quotation, she uses the term 'meaning' for what we intend to express, namely our thoughts, our feelings or our perception that we think, we feel or we perceive. A language is used with the purpose of communicating with other persons, but also for numerous other aims, like organizing our own thoughts, or memorizing.

In reality, we find that language, which is also called 'the shaper of ideas' by Whorf (1956:213, after Wierzbicka), looks different in form when comparing languages spoken in places which are geographically a long distance apart.

In this paper, such differences of language form, i.e. structural patterns, are discussed in relation to various types of interactions between grammar, culture and human cognition. Many researchers have attempted to explain the relations. Everett (2005 in his lecture) provides the following table in which he illustrates the six main earlier types of studies on constraint relationships between culture, grammar and cognition.

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1 For more discussion on the relationship between language and thought, see Wierzbicka (1992:3-27).
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The constraint relationships (Everett 2005). The arrow ‘→’ is read as ‘constrains’ Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONSTRAINT RELATIONSHIP</th>
<th>SAMPLE RESEARCH PROGRAMME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. cognition → grammar</td>
<td>Chomsky's Universal Grammar</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. grammar → cognition</td>
<td>Linguistic Relativity (Whorf, Lucy, etc)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. cognition → culture</td>
<td>Brent &amp; Berlin (1969) on colour terms</td>
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<td>4. grammar → culture</td>
<td>Urban’s (1991) work on discourse-centered culture</td>
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<td>5. culture → cognition</td>
<td>Anthropological research on semantic fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. culture → grammar</td>
<td>ETHNOGRAMMAR; individual forms structured by culture (e.g. evidentials or Sapir 1915)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the present paper I will focus on an example of ethnogrammatical effect, which is in row 6 of Table 1. According to Enfield (2002), the concept of ethnosyntax is defined as “the study of connections between the cultural knowledge, attitude, and practices of speakers, and the morphosyntactic resources they employ in speech” (Enfield 2002:3) in a broad sense, and more precisely, “This field of research asks not just how culture and grammar may be connected, but also how they may be interconstitutive, through overlap and interplay between people’s cultural practices and preoccupations and the grammatical structures they habitually employ” (Enfield 2002:4).

As one approach to ethnogrammatical study, Newman (2002) examines ‘give’-clauses in the following seven languages: Amele (Papua New Guinea), English, Japanese, Chipewyan (Canada, Athapaskan), Maori, Nahuatl and Zulu. The study on the ‘give’-event is of interest because there are normally three participants involved: the giver, the thing transferred, and the recipient. In this construction we can see culture-influenced interactions with regard to those three participants, above all, in the relationship between the giver and the recipient. In the study of ‘give’-clauses in Japanese, Newman refers to the ‘verticality’ principle (Nakane 1970, 1972, Mizutani 1981) in Japanese society. It is often said that concepts of social verticality, which are based on a person’s age or social status, and respectfulness to other persons, play an important role when choosing the appropriate word to a certain person in a certain situation. According to Newman there are 7 types of ‘give’ verbs in Japanese, depending on how the speaker perceives the relative status of the giver and the recipient. Thus, what we may see behind the ‘give’-clause in Japanese is the relation between the giver and the recipient on the vertical social scale, and the speaker’s opinion about the relation between the two participants. As another example of ethnogrammatical effect in a language, the rich system of Japanese honorifics is sometimes referred to, i.e. words or grammatical forms used to convey honor to someone perceived as a social superior, which may also reflect this vertical principle in Japanese society.

The purpose of the present paper is to study the structural pattern of the Japanese suffix -garu from an ethnogrammatical perspective. My aim is to discuss what types of cultural aspects the construction of -garu suffix is relating to, and what the relation is based on.

2. Structural pattern of -garu suffix in Japanese

In Japanese, somatic adjectives such as itai ‘hurt’ and kayui ‘itchy’, and mental adjectives such as ureshii ‘glad’ and kanashii ‘sad’ refer normally to the first person without mentioning it. Thus, the experiencer (i.e. first person watashi ‘I’) in such statements is often omitted. Likewise, for verbs of perception or emotion, i.e. mental verbs (Croft 2003:191), such as tabetai ‘want to eat’, the first person is the presupposed experiencer of the mental state. Therefore, the sentences in (1) are acceptable, whereas sentences in (2) sound strange for native speakers of Japanese.
(1) (Watashi wa) ureshii / kanashii / kayui / tabetai.
   I NOM glad / sad / itchy / eat-WANT
   ‘I am glad / I am sad / I itch / I want to eat’

(2) *Kare wa ureshii / kanashii / kayui / tabetai.
   He NOM glad / sad / itchy / eat-WANT
   ‘He is glad / he is sad / he itches / he wants to eat’

There are some ways of referring to another person’s internal experiences in Japanese. One way is to use the form -souda ‘look (like)’ which describes the speaker’s impression of the observed person, as in (3) below.

(3) Kare wa ureshi -souda.
   he NOM is glad looks
   ‘he looks glad’

Another way is to use the forms -darou/deshou ‘I doubt, I wonder, I guess’ which illustrate the speaker’s doubt or assumption with respect to the preceding sentence.

(4) Kare wa ureshii -darou/deshou.
   he NOM is glad I doubt, I wonder, I guess
   ‘he must be glad’

The uses of the constructions -souda, -darou/deshou shown above are, however, not limited to describing another person’s mental or bodily experiences. These uses may actually be seen in any sentence in which the speaker’s assumption is reflected:

(5) Ashita wa ame ga furii -souda.
   tomorrow TOPIC rain NOM fall looks
   ‘it looks rain tomorrow’

What is more interesting here is that Japanese has a particular structural pattern in which the speaker merely can describe a third person’s physical or psychological representations from the speaker’s observational viewpoint. The suffix -garu is the case and it is combined with mental verbs/adjectives. The sentences in (2) above are thus rewritten as in (6):

(6) Kare wa ureshigaru / kanashigaru / kayugaru / tabetogaru.
   He NOM glad / sad / itchy / eat-WANT – SHOW.SIGN.OF
   ‘He seems glad / he seems sad / he seems to feel itchy / he seems to want to eat’
   [literally ‘he shows a sign of being glad / sad / feel itchy / anxious to eat’]

Again, this construction indicates only the speaker’s observations and assumptions with respect to the third person’s psychological or physical experiences. Hence, it does not refer to the first person, i.e. the speaker. Sasaki (1994:139) gives an example where this pattern fails to be used. The speaker is an exchange student from Hungary and he has wife and a child in his country. In this sentence the speaker expresses his own emotion, i.e. loneliness, from an objective viewpoint.

(7) *Watashi mo samishigatte imasu.
   I too lonely-SHOW.SIGN.OF being
   ‘*I seem to feeling lonely, too’
Morphologically, the last vowel i at the end of mental verbs and adjectives are deleted, and instead the suffix -garu is attached, as can be seen in Table 2:

### The structural pattern of -garu form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mental verb</th>
<th>structural pattern</th>
<th>-garu form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tabetai 'want to eat'</td>
<td>tabetagaru 's/he seems willing to eat'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ureshii 'glad'</td>
<td>ureshigaru 's/he seems glad'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>itai 'hurt'</td>
<td>itogaru 's/he seems to have pain'</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adjective (emotion, perception)</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>desire, anxiousness</td>
<td>tabetagaru 's/he seems willing to eat'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>positive feeling</td>
<td>ureshigaru 's/he seems glad'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative feeling</td>
<td>kanashigaru 's/he seems sad'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>auditory sense</td>
<td>urusogaru 's/he seems to be suffering from noise'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tactile/non-tactile bodily experience</td>
<td>itogaru 's/he seems to have pain'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>visual sense</td>
<td>mabushigaru 's/he seems to be suffering from strong light'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**3. Analysis and Discussion**

In the field of ethnogrammar, researchers consider that it is well worth exploring “the idea that a language’s morphosyntactic resources are related to the cultural knowledge, attitudes and practices of its speakers” (Enfield 2002:24).

Following this idea, I will now discuss what types of cultural aspects the constructions with the -garu suffix relate to, and what the relation is based on. In order to examine this grammatical pattern and its cultural background, I will analyze the semantics of words that can be combined with -garu suffix.

**Words the -garu suffix can be combined with**

<table>
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We see above that the -garu suffix can be combined with words indicating a third person’s desire or anxiousness to do something, positive and negative emotions, and bodily perceptions (auditory, tactile and visual senses). The speaker may observe a third person’s emotions and perceptions both in direct and indirect ways. For instance, in the context of kare ga kanashigaru ‘he seems sad’, it is supposed that the speaker would directly see or hear a third person crying. In an indirect way it is supposed that the speaker may observe a third person’s circumstances which imply that the third person would be sad because of some reasons, e.g. leaving the family or having an accident etc.

In the table (3) above we see no example of use of -garu suffix for tasting expressions that illustrate how a third person tastes food. It is remarkable because
we can in fact observe a person who tastes something bad or good by watching his/her face, and/or that s/he spits out food and so on. However, the -garu suffix does not apply to describing a third person’s taste sensation. It may be necessary to gather more data concerning expressions for taste sensation in Japanese. Yet it is not my purpose to resolve the difference in perception types. It is sufficient here to note that the -garu suffix can be combined with some sense adjectives. Interestingly, in particular cases, e.g. literary works, it is not always obligatory to use -garu suffix when expressing a third person’s emotions and perceptions. This use is sometimes seen in literary works for children. For instance, from a work Thumbelina written by Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875), one sentence is translated to Japanese without using -garu suffix, as in (5) below:

(5) oyayubihime wa chittomo ureshikuarimasen.
Thumbelina NOM not at all is glad-NOT
‘Thumbelina is not glad at all’

This sentence is normally unacceptable in Japanese grammar if not the speaker herself is the thumb-sized little girl, i.e. Thumbelina. Yet in the context of narrative discourse it may be possible that the speaker, i.e. writer, amalgamates his or her own perspective with that of the main character of the story. This utterance is therefore made from Thumbelina’s perspective, not from the speaker’s.

Which cultural aspect is embodied in the structural pattern of -garu suffix in Japanese? In my view, from a Japanese point of view, the encoding of the -garu suffix for expressing a third person’s desires, emotions and perceptions seems to reflect the ‘respectfulness’ and ‘politeness’ of Japanese society, which has also been discussed concerning the ‘give’-clauses. The difference between them is the issue of what is held in respect by the speaker.

For the structural pattern in ‘give’-clauses it is important that “the speaker must take into account the relative positions of giver and recipient along a vertical social scale” (Newman 2002). On the other hand, in the -garu structural pattern, the speaker must take into account to what extent the speaker is able to express the other person’s own feelings from the subjective perspective without confusing him or herself with the third person. Probably, describing another person’s own emotions seems inconsiderate or going to extremes for the Japanese mind in that it is a very private and sensitive matter for the individual. In addition, in Japan, it is sometimes regarded that being calm and not showing one’s own feelings on the face is a good virtue.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this study I have investigated the Japanese -garu suffix which is combined only with the expressions of a third person’s emotions, perceptions and desires, and its cultural background from an ethnogrammatical viewpoint. On the basis of my own research I came to the conclusion that the speaker of Japanese distinguishes his or her own psychological and physical experiences from those of other persons by using the -garu suffix. This is assumed to be due to the Japanese attitude of assuming a respectful distance from another person’s private feelings and sensations. It is often said that the best way to acquire a foreign language is to live in the country where the language is spoken. This idea suggests that learning a language requires not only to study its grammar and lexicon, but also to experience the culture. In this respect, ethnogrammatical studies may be very relevant to use, in order to explain this close linkage between grammar and culture.
This discussion about language and culture is, however, still superficial for me. First, based on the claim “language is a tool for expressing meaning” by Wierzbicka (1992:3) and the fact that we use language to communicate with other people, we should actually take people’s communication styles into consideration. In this sense, it must be meaningful to discuss people’s ancient lifestyle and the way people formed relationships with each other within a society. I suppose that agricultural people, e.g. the Japanese, must have different types of relationships from hunters and gatherers, or nomads. People who earn their living in paddy cultivation would surely feel a strong need for helping each other in a society, because setting out rice plants and harvesting rice were primary group work. It must be important for them to be able to work together in a group without offending the neighbours. For that reason it is not surprising that Japanese people attach much value to an attitude of ‘respectfulness’, and this cultural aspect influences their communication tool, i.e. language and its grammar.

Second, further discussion is needed in order to define the term ‘culture’. Goddard (2005) has identified five different senses of the word ‘culture’ in contemporary English. The interpretation of ‘culture’ can vary depending on which frame of reference is concerned and how we mark off one ‘culture’ from another.

Finally, it is worth noting that this kind of discussion on cultural-associated aspects of a language always involves “the dangers of subjectivism and arbitrariness”, stressed by Wierzbicka (1992:392). She points out that “the important thing to do is to try to sharpen our analytical tools and to develop safeguards for the study of the ‘dangerous area’”. In future studies it is important to be aware that it is not a simple link we are looking for between a language and the cultural background that its speakers employ. There are many difficulties in defining the link, and, in fact, there is no clear one-to-one pairing between one cultural aspect and a language’s grammar.

5. References


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2 The concepts of culture in English (Goddard 2005):
A1: the distinctive ways of living, thinking, and behaving of different kinds of people in far-way locations, e.g. Samoan culture.
A2: the distinctive ways of living, thinking and behaving of any localized kind of people (not excluding ourselves, e.g. European culture.
B: different ‘kinds of people’, each with its own subculture, e.g. youth culture.
C: a collectivity of people who need not live together in a single place, but who nevertheless do many things together and are seen as sharing distinctive attitudes and behaviors, e.g. police culture, culture of secrecy.
D: the “artistic works and practices”.