

Aspectual Compound Verbs in Japanese: From the Perspective of Aspectual Prefixes in Polish

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1. Research goals

This research aims to elucidate the similarities and differences between Japanese compound verbs, which form one part of the aspectual system in Japanese, and Polish verbs, which are formed by the addition of aspectual adpositions, for pedagogical purposes in the second language acquisition of both languages. It is hoped that through contrast with Polish, which possesses a highly prominent system of aspectual forms, the position occupied by compound verbs in the Japanese aspectual system as well as the characteristic of Japanese whereby verbs do not necessarily guarantee an action's telicity (for simple verbs at least, the *-ta* form does not guarantee telicity) will become clearer.

2. Background to the research: Japanese aspectual compound verbs and aspectual system in Polish

Compound verbs are often considered a unique form typical for the Japanese language. Due to their great variety and the difficulty of their acquisition for learners, compound verbs have also been highlighted in the field of Japanese language education. There are a few types of compound verbs in Japanese. Some of them are described as grammatical. These verbs, represented by *-hajimeru* and *-owaru* (as in *yomihajimeru*, begin to read, and *yomiowaru*, finish reading), can be added to almost every verb, and not only the simple verb, but also passive or causative form (for example *yomasarehajimeru*, to begin being forced to reading). Compound verbs of this type are relatively easy to learn. The problem is the other type, namely lexical compound verbs. For lexical compound verbs, V2—unlikely *-hajimeru* or *-owaru*—can only be added to some verbs (there are even verbs which only combine with one verb, such as *-wabiru*, only combining with *matsu*, as in *machiwabiru*, to wait), also adding V2 to passive or causative forms of V1 is not possible. Lexical compound verbs were usually divided into six classes, but Kageyama (2013) proposes a new classification—into thematic compound verbs, in which case V1 modifies V2, as in *tatakitsubusu*: to knock down, to smash up (*tataku* means to hit or knock and *tsubusu* to crush, to smash), and aspectual compound verbs, whereby V2 modifies V1, describing the way action expressed by V1 was conducted:

Lexical-aspect. Thematic compound verbs are common in many other languages, but aspectual compound verbs are said to be unique, typical probably only for Japanese language (Kageyama 2013, 5). This research focuses on aspectual compound verbs and their relation to Polish aspectual adverbs.

In the traditional discourse compound verbs were not likely discussed as aspectual forms in Japanese language, with most research and papers focusing on *-te-iru* form as the main representation of aspect in Japanese. However recent studies, such as Kageyama (2013) describe compound verbs as a part of the Japanese aspectual system.

Considering Japanese compound verbs a part of aspectual system seems even more appropriate if discussed from Polish language perspective.

The Polish aspectual system is based on the opposition between perfective-form verbs and imperfective-form verbs. As used in this research, the term perfectivity “indicates the view of a situation as a single whole, without distinction of the various separate phases that make up that situation; while the imperfective pays essential attention to the internal structure of the situation.” (Comrie 1987, 16)

The opposition between imperfective- and perfective-forms in Polish language is primarily realized in the following three ways, although there are also—very numerous—examples of verbs which do not possess oppositions between imperfective- and perfective-form (*żyć*, to live) and verbs that can be used in function of perfective-form verb as well as imperfective-form verb, such as *abdykować*, to abdicate.

- a. apophony (stem mutation) – as showed in Table 1., some pairs of the imperfective- and perfective-form verbs in Polish base on apophony
- b. perfective adpositions—in this case the perfective-form verb is derived from the imperfective-form by adding one of many perfective adpositions functioning in Polish; some of perfective adpositions only modify the verb’s aspect, some of them also add new meaning to the imperfective-form verb. In the pair of verbs showed in Table 1. below adposition *na-* in the verb *napisać* (to write up) only has function of modifying verb aspect to perfective.
- c. pairs of verbs only bound by meaning—pairs of verb with different stem, but analogical meaning (it’s the same phenomenon as in Japanese verbs *korosu* 殺す (to kill) and *shinu* 死ぬ (to die), often regarded as a pair in terms of transitivity in Japanese language)

Table 1. Opposition of imperfective- and perfective-form verbs in Polish

perfective adposition type		apophony type		irregular	
imperfective-form	perfective-form	imperfective	perfective	imperfective	perfective
pisać	napisać	rzucać	rzucić	brać	wziąć
to write		to throw		to take	

3. Aspectual compound verbs and perfectivity in Japanese language

As showed in section 2, Polish language possesses a highly prominent system of aspectual forms, in which opposition between imperfective- and perfective-form of verbs is fundamental. Almost every verb in Polish has two “versions”: imperfective and perfective one, and speakers have to choose between them every time they use a verb.

However, in Japanese, a speaker is not constantly aware of a verb’s telicity, nor do grammatical forms express such a characteristic. Probably not all of native speakers and definitely not all of Japanese language learners are aware of it, but most of Japanese verbs do not guarantee actions’ perfectivity: for simple verbs at least, the *-ta* form does not guarantee telicity, which is the reason why sentences such as (1)a are considered grammatically correct in Japanese language (but often sound strange and unfamiliar to Japanese language learners).

(1)a Koroshita kedo shinanakatta.

殺したけど死ななかつた。

to kill-PAST but to die-NEG.PAST

(1)b I killed him, but he didn’t die.

Of course Japanese has numerous linguistic form to express action’s telicity; one of them are aspectual compound verbs. In general, compound verbs in Japanese seem to share the tendency of general imperfectivity with simple verbs, but some of the aspectual compound verbs, namely: *-ageru/-agaru*, *-dasu* and *-kiru*, do modify verbal aspect of V1. Therefore, sentences such as (2)a become ungrammatical.

(2)a *Nigedashita kedo nigenakatta.

*逃げ出したけど逃げなかつた。

to run away-PAST but run-NEG.PAST

(2)b She ran away but didn’t escape.

By examining Japanese compound verbs from this perspective the peculiarities of *-ageru/-*

agaru, *-dasu* and *-kiru* become apparent.

4. Polish perfective adpositions and Japanese compound verbs

As mentioned above, Polish perfective adpositions not only modify verbal aspect but may also add new meaning to the verb. Both functions are also attested in Japanese compound verbs. Although verbs with transparent meaning and perfective aspect (*kaki-ageru* 書き上げる “write up”) also exist and there are verbs with both functions (*ii-dasu* 言い出す “suggest”) too, V2 usually only assigns new meaning to V1. Phenomenon showed below clearly doesn’t apply to each compound verb in Japanese and each Polish verb with adpositions, but Table 2 shows how Japanese compound verbs and Polish perfective adpositions correspond in case of the verb “write”: *писаć* in Polish and *kaku* 書く in Japanese.

Table 2 Verb *писаć* with perfective adpositions and corresponding Japanese compound verbs

Polish verb	Japanese verb
<i>писаć</i> (imperfective) write	<i>kaku</i> 書く write
<i>napisać</i> (perfective) write up	<i>kaki-ageru</i> 書き上げる write up
<i>zapisać</i> (perfective) write down, record, enroll	<i>kaki-shirusu</i> 書き記す write down, record, enroll
<i>wypisać</i> (perfective) write out	<i>kaki-dasu</i> 書き出す write out
<i>wpisać</i> (perfective) write in	<i>kaki-komu</i> 書き込む write in
<i>przepisać</i> (perfective) rewrite	<i>kaki-utsusu</i> 書き写す copy, transcribe
...	...

Although main function of Polish perfective adpositions (modification of the verb aspect) and V2 in Japanese (adding new meaning to V1) may not be the same, it can be clearly seen in Table 2 that there certainly is a correlation between compound verbs and Polish perfective adpositions. This phenomenon requires further research.

5. From perspective of language teaching

Japanese compound verbs display great variety and the difficulty of their acquisition for learners, the author included, has been highlighted in the field of Japanese language education. Many of Japanese language learners, regardless of their mother tongue, learn compound verbs as a vocabulary rather than understand them as a system. Since Japanese language learners, even at an advance level, cannot fully understand and apply the rules of forming compound

verbs, they tend to only use few compound verbs they often hear and managed to remember. In case of compound verbs, unlike many other items considered difficult to learn (for example *-te-iru* form), not errors made by student are the problem, but rather students' tendency to avoid using compound verbs at all. Considering significant similarity between Japanese compound verbs and Polish perfective-form verbs (especially adpositions-type verbs), showing this similarities to Polish language speakers in process of teaching Japanese language could presumably help them understand the phenomenon of Japanese compound verbs.

On the other hand, the fundamental opposition in usage of perfective- and imperfective-form verbs in Polish also presents issues for Polish language education. Previous research by the author has revealed that even at an advanced level, native Japanese learners of Polish display a strong tendency to use imperfective-form verbs in contexts where a native speaker would typically use a perfective-form verb. The two sentences below come from essays written by Japanese students as a homework for their Polish language classes at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies: (3)a and (4)a show sentences as written by the students, while (3)b and (4)b present the way a native Polish language speaker would most likely couch the same sentence.

(3)a Pojechaliśmy do Shibuya i jadłyśmy krowie języki.

go-PRF.PST.1PL to Shibuya-LOC and eat-IPRF.PST.1PL cow tongue-ACC.PL

(3)b Pojechaliśmy do dzielnicy Shibuya i zjadłyśmy ozory wołowe.

go-PRF.PST.1PL to district-LOC Shibuya and eat-PRF.PST.1PL cow tongue-ACC.PL

(3)c We went to Shibuya and ate beef tongues.

(4)a Pamiętaj, poszliśmy do sklepu i kupowałyśmy takie same sukienki.

remember-2SG. go-PRF.PST. 1PL to shop-LOC and buy- IPRF.PST.1PL same-ACC.PL dress-ACC.PL

(4)b Pamiętaj, poszliśmy do sklepu i kupiłyśmy takie same sukienki.

remember-2SG. go-PRF.PST.1PL to shop-LOC and buy- PRF.PST.1PL same-ACC.PL dress-ACC.PL

(4)c Remember, we went to the store and bought us same dresses.

As potential causes to this phenomenon following three can be suggested. First, in Polish language classes at TUFs students are first introduced to the imperfective-forms of verbs and during the first semester only learn – and use - imperfective-forms. Although, due to the complicatedness of the Polish language aspectual system, introducing students to both, imperfective- and perfective-form of Polish verbs simultaneously seems too difficult and could cause students to lose their motivation, this may be one of the causes to the overuse of

imperfective-form verbs by the students.

Secondly, in compare to imperfective-form verbs, perfective-forms tend to be more complicated in form (since they are often derived by adding an adposition). Since there are many different adpositions in Polish and no clearly rules which of them should be chosen for which verb, students may feel confused and tend to avoid using the adposition-type perfective-form verbs. As mentioned above, during previous research on this topic the author didn't find many errors including perfective adpositions by Japanese students, however the strong tendency to use imperfective-form verbs was remarkable regardless of the students' level.

Finally, as proved in the section 3, most of Japanese verbs do not guarantee telicity; unlike native speakers of Polish, Japanese language speakers aren't constantly aware of an action's telicity, and imperfectivity doesn't appear unnatural to them. However, teaching perfective adpositions by using analogies between Japanese compound verbs and Polish adpositions, could be effective also for Japanese speakers Polish language students.

Conclusion

From the perspective of Polish language, similarity of Japanese aspectual compound verbs and Polish perfective-form verbs becomes visible. Based on this similarity, it also appears clear that aspectual compound verbs should be considered a part of the aspectual system of Japanese language, not only vocabulary. Analogies between the two languages can presumably be used in process of teaching Japanese as a foreign language to Polish language speakers, and teaching Polish to Japanese language speakers.

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