Relation between Japanese character types and grammaticalisation

Mayu Kawakita
University of Tokyo, Department of Language and Information Science
snsdsj1d@yahoo.co.jp

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The Japanese language has two types of scripts, Kanji and Kana, and they are sensitive to the degree of grammaticalization. The purpose of this research is to examine —through corpus researches and sentence production experiments— the effect of grammaticalisation on Japanese letters.

Kanji is ideographic with the characters representing semantic units. In contrast Kana represents a phonological speech unit (Morton and Sasanuma, 1984). Further, there are two kinds of Kana — Hiragana (cursive Kana) and Katakana (square Kana). In this paper, only Hiragana is interpreted because grammatical elements in Japanese are represented in Hiragana.

The present research hypothesizes that grammaticalization is reflected in the Japanese auxiliary verbs. Some Japanese verbs have two usages, — as a main verb and as an auxiliary verb. Main verbs are used independently and their literal meaning is that of the verbs. In contrast, the literal meaning of Auxiliary verbs is no longer that of the main verbs. Although auxiliary verb constructions in Japanese are originally incorporated with Kanji, over the course of grammalticalization, Kanji has slowly replaced with Hiragana. To demonstrate this, some corpora from the modern Japanese language and some from the present Japanese language were compared. Eight frequently used phrases were used as the basis for comparison. These phrases were collected from the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). Examples include "V *te miru* (てみる/て見る)" [try to do something], "*Miru*" written in Kanji means "to see" or "to look", but this meaning is not reflected in a grammaticalized sentence. Instead it is interpreted as "try to do something" This research shows that there are differences in Japanese between the 19~20th century and the 21st century; the latter uses more Hiragana than the former in auxiliary verb usages . This observation illustrates the effect of grammaticalisation on representation of constructions.

In another study conducted from the perspective of cognitive science, Kanji and Hiragana demonstrated to additional differences. Shinozuka and Kubota (2012) showed that Kanji accesses semantic recognition directly, whereas Hiragana needs phonological recognition to access the semantic recognition, making Kanji easier to interpret. Since grammaticalization is the phenomenon of "lexical terms" and "constructions" represented in diverse linguistic contexts to demonstrate grammatical functions (Hopper and Traugott, 1993), Kanji has changed into Hiragana because a Kanji construction forces the reader to interpret the original meaning. In this research, a sentence production experiment involving Japanese native speakers was performed. The experiment focused on the Japanese main verb "*morau* (貰う) " [receive], and the auxiliary verb "*te morau* (てもらう) " [to have someone to do something]. The subjects were asked to construct a sentence using "morau" written in Kanji characters or in Hiragana characters. This experiment revealed that Japanese native speakers have a tendency to use "morau" as a main verb when it is written in Kanji characters. It could also mean that Japanese native speakers store the main verb "morau" and the auxiliary verb "morau" as different words in their mental lexicon. In other words, the difference of representation in the written language could affect Japanese native speakers' storage of mental lexicon. This result could help clarify other aspects about human cognition between visual representation and semantic interpretation.

References
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