SYNTACTIC AND DISCOURSIVE CONSTRAINTS OF SOME JAPANESE ADJECTIVES IN RELATION TO THEIR CONCEPTUAL DOMAINS

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It has been recognized that adjectives in Japanese are unstable compared to other grammatical categories of the Japanese language. Some grammarians say that it is because they have not achieved a full development in the history of the language. This is the problem I have kept in mind for a long time: why adjectives have been left behind when other grammatical elements have reached the final stage of ‘development’ of the language.

With this in mind, I made an investigation of a Japanese adjective ‘itai’ (meaning ‘painful’) and have found that the conceptual distance correlates with the grammatical complexity (Hori 2004). That is, when the pain belongs to the speaker-self, the expression is the shortest, but when it belongs to another person, the expression becomes longer. This phenomenon well accords with the examples given by Croft (2001: 360). According to him, in some languages linguistic distance correlates with conceptual distance, the former being measured by the grammatical complexity and the latter by the actual relations of the person and the thing.

Based on my study of ‘itai’, I plan to continue investigating some other adjectives. The problems to be questioned will be: (1) what syntactic constrains exist for each adjective; (2) what conceptual distance from the speaker is implied in each adjective; (3) what is the possible concept underlying each adjective and how it affects the syntactic and discoursive constraints.

REFERENCES