

Guided by Teramura Hideo's Research on Japanese Grammar: Toward Cooperation with Japanese Language Education

LUO Han (Tohoku University)

Introduction

In recent years in Japan, with the increase in the acceptance of foreign workers and immigrants, there is a concern about the lack of school education, especially teaching language skills. In order to enhance Japanese language education, it seems incumbent on Japan to improve the basic content and methods of education, research and development of Japanese language teaching methods, and training of Japanese language teachers. In doing so, it is important to strengthen not only the effort of Japanese language teachers, but also the cooperation between Japanese language education and Japanese linguistics, especially the descriptive research of Japanese grammar.

Regarding the descriptive research of Japanese grammar, there are various stances in terms of what to describe. According to *Nihongogaku Daijiten* 'The Encyclopedia of Japanese Linguistics', it has at least three features: a) unlike generative grammar,¹ it is an approach that describes the grammar without assuming a specific assumption or method; b) it targets whether or not a specific expression is possible and it is not speculative beyond a certain level; and c) it tries to make certain abstractions while aiming at elaborate descriptions of meaning and usage as well as form in description. In short, descriptive grammar is grammar aiming at "relating such things as in what cases, what meanings and forms are being matched, what expressions can be used, how to use similar expressions as closely as possible and organize them in a way that is easy to understand." In the background, there is also a motivation to clarify the "structure of Japanese grammar" that can be used in Japanese language education.

Having confirmed the characteristics of descriptive grammar, we may now consider what purposes it has. According to Noda (2001), the descriptive research of Japanese grammar has the following three purposes:

- (1) For education (acquisition of basic knowledge, improvement of thinking ability, improvement of expressive and understanding ability)
- (2) For applications in related fields (Japanese language education, natural

¹ "Generative grammar", according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary 9th Edition, is "a type of grammar which describes a language by giving a set of rules which can be used to produce all the possible sentences in that language."

- language processing, literature research, etc.)
- (3) For linguistics (theoretical, historical, and contrasting studies on Japanese)

Of particular note is the special purpose of applications in related fields. For the purpose of “application,” it is not that Japanese linguistics exist autonomously from related fields; rather, the idea is to construct Japanese linguistics with the aim of applying it to related fields from the beginning. In that case, Japanese linguistics cannot be conceived without contributions to related fields (e.g., Japanese language education). Even if the descriptive research of Japanese grammar is basic research in itself, it will be characterized as an applied and practical discipline in a sense. It seeks to recognize “applied linguistics” rather than the “application of linguistics,” and it tends to direct future research down a specific path.

This paper seeks to discuss what is needed for the study of descriptive Japanese grammar in more detail, especially from the viewpoint of cooperation with Japanese language education. In order to do that, I will draw simple sketches of the living footprints and research findings of one of the most renowned Japanese linguists and educators, Teramura Hideo, who has greatly influenced both the study of modern Japanese grammar and Japanese language education.

The first part of this paper offers an overview of Teramura’s life path and his main research. The second part attempts to consider his research motivations and the academic environment that influenced and characterized his studies. The third part seeks to bring out what we can learn from Teramura’s experience as a researcher of Japanese grammar.

Part 1: Teramura’s Life Path and Research Contribution

Teramura was born in Japan’s Hyogo Prefecture in 1928 and died in 1990 as an active professor at Osaka University’s Faculty of Letters. He began studying Japanese in earnest only when he was nearly 40 years old. Prior to that, he studied and worked in several different fields, partly due to the end of the war and the post-war period of confusion. One of the major turning points,² or perhaps a substantial start for Teramura’s research life, was his job at Osaka University of Foreign Studies, specializing in international students. This turning point of teaching Japanese to international students is also considered to be a catalyst for Teramura developing the academic environment that permeated his entire study of Japanese grammar.

Nevertheless, Teramura was first a researcher of English before he was a researcher of Japanese. Two years before he started working at Osaka University of

² Another turning point of his research life is considered to be his encounter with grammar scholar Mikami Akakira (1903-1971). Teramura had always admired Mikami as a mentor for his grammar research since meeting him (cf. Nita 1991, Noda 2011).

Foreign Studies, he had been studying at the University of Hawaii, Washington University, and the University of Pennsylvania for as long as three years as a scholar of the United States East West Center. Noam Chomsky³ had recently published the book *Syntactic Structures* in the Netherlands in 1957, and during the same period of time, generative grammar, which is a linguistic theory dealing with the human mind's hypothesized innate capacity for language, was in the process of fighting for citizenship. Witnessing that period of change in American linguistics not only gave Teramura's study of Japanese grammar a large and wide field of view, but also made him a Japanese language specialist who was very knowledgeable about the latest research results overseas.

Teramura's main writings include *Nihongo no Bunpo* 'Japanese Grammar' (two volumes), *Nihongo no Shintakusu to Imi* 'Syntax and Semantics in Japanese' (three volumes), and *Teramura Hideo Ronbunshu* 'Collection of Papers by Hideo Teramura' (two volumes), which was published after his death. Additionally, there is *an Introduction to the Structure of Japanese: Workbook* (Vol. 1 and 2, 1973, Vol. 3, 1975), a textbook for Japanese language education. Of these books, *Nihongo no Shintakusu to Imi* 'Syntax and Semantics in Japanese' is so often cited in both Japanese and English papers on contemporary Japanese grammar that it is known as the bible of Japanese grammar researchers and Japanese language educators (cf. Nita 1991, Kubota 2000).

To learn more about Teramura's Japanese studies, let us take a look at *Nihongo no Shintakusu to Imi* 'Syntax and Semantics in Japanese,' which is considered to be the culmination of his research. Simply put, the main characteristic of this book would be practical grammar. Practical grammar, as will be described in detail later, means that if one has a grammar book and a dictionary, despite not knowing Japanese, they can make Japanese sentences like native speakers. For "practical grammar," it is necessary to avoid overly abstracting the grammar by brandishing a theory that cannot be understood without special training. In the opposite direction, merely listing facts does not result in an efficient description either, because it is disqualified as a practical grammar. Teramura's grammar aims at the middle: it uses modest abstractions and systematizations that anyone can understand without years of linguistics training.

Another feature of this book is the great interest in contrasting Japanese with other languages. The contrast is not a superficial one, but rather a conscious effort to find as many phenomena common to other languages as possible and to give a universal explanation for Japanese grammatical phenomena. For example, in a Japanese sentence that uses *hoshi* 'want' or *ureshi* 'happy' as a predicate, the subject of the emotion is limited to the first person, but in an English sentence, similar

³ Here, I have to mention that Noam Chomsky, who may be known as a social critic or a political activist, has been doing research on linguistics and cognitive science since his early career. His main books on linguistics are *Syntactic Structures* (1975), *Current Issues in Linguistic Theory* (1964), *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (1965), etc.

predicates/verbs like “want” and “happy” have no such restrictions. Instead of such a simple comparison, Teramura pointed out that what is more essential and universal is that the object of “strike,” which means “to get a strong impression of something” in English, is limited to the first person: “It strikes me that you are unfriendly” is the same in Japanese (Teramura 1982:145-149).

This book is written with the contrast with other languages in mind; thus, it is also a very useful grammar book for researchers of other languages to gain knowledge of Japanese when conducting contrasting research with Japanese.

Part 2: Teramura’s Motivation to Research Japanese Linguistics

Having taken a brief overview of Teramura’s life path and his main research, we should now consider his research motivations and the academic environment that influenced and characterized his studies.

First, let us start with what Teramura’s grammar study aimed at. Matsushita Daizaburo⁴ (1878-1935), another Japanese linguist senior to Teramura by fifty years, who taught Japanese to foreign students from the Qing Dynasty, stated his own grammar study opportunity in the preface of Matsushita (1928).⁵

When I (Matsushita Daizaburo) was a boy, I was surprised at the terrible quality of the most popular book *Tyuto Kyoiku Nihon Buntan* ‘Japanese Textbook on Secondary Education’ authored by Ochiai and Konakamura, compared to the English textbook of W. Swinton. If you read the English one, somehow you can make English sentences as long as you have a Japanese–English dictionary. However, as for the case in which you give Anglo–American people *Nihon Buntan* ‘Japanese Textbook’ and an English–Japanese dictionary, I doubt if they can make Japanese sentences. This is really due to the deficiency of *Nihon Buntan* ‘Japanese Textbook’. With that in mind, I decided to take over the task of completing the Japanese grammar textbook and go to Tokyo to study in the

⁴ According to Seki (2008), Matsushita had 20 years of experience in Japanese language education, and the grammar description of his Japanese textbooks (*Kanyakunihonkaitei* and *Kanyakunihonkogobuntan*) is not based on “Japanese linguistics and linguistics at the time,” but rather a unique one pursuing grammar that is useful for Japanese language education.

⁵ The following English text is translated by the author. The original Japanese text is as follows: “私は少年の頃、当時最も世に行われて居つた中等教育日本文典落合・小中村両先生合著とスキントンの英文典の二書を読んで其の体系の優劣の甚しいのに驚いた。英文典は之を一読すれば和英辞典さへ有れば曲がりなりにも英文が作れる。然らば英米人に日本文典と英和辞典とを与へれば日本の文が作れるかといふと、そうは行かない。これは実に日本文典の不備からである。そう思った私は僭越ながら日本文典の完成に任じようというふ志を立て、明治二十六年の夏瓢然として東都遊学の途に上つたのであった。” (Matsushita 1928:1)

summer of 1893.

Quoting about two-thirds of this paragraph, Teramura wrote in his book *Nihongo no Shintakusu to Imi* ‘Syntax and Semantics in Japanese’: “The purpose of this book is exactly the same, and in that sense the goal of this book is to create a *Jitsuyo Bunpo* ‘working grammar’”⁶ (Teramura 1982:15). It’s clear from this that Teramura’s aim was to complete a systematic and practical study of Japanese grammar.

According to Nita (1991), what Teramura’s “working grammar” aimed for was to fully and explicitly show the regularity of the connection between Japanese syntax and meaning. To be more specific, creating a “working grammar” reveals the language proficiency of a native Japanese speaker with which one can interpret a certain form of a Japanese sentence appropriately and create an appropriate sentence form according to different contexts.

The purpose of creating a working grammar is not only influenced by Teramura’s involvement in teaching Japanese to international students, but also influenced by the fact that there was not much to rely on when considering grammar for teaching Japanese to non-native speakers. Regarding the former influence, Teramura looked back on his own research life later in the year, saying, “In my case, looking back on my grammar research so far, the problems I was trying to deal with were often triggered by questions from foreign students”⁷ (Teramura 1988:112). In the language education of non-native speakers, it is necessary to acquire a language ability as close as possible to that of a native speaker to generate only qualified sentences, and responding completely to that request is by no means an easy task. If one has experience teaching their native language to a foreigner, they may have noticed that many questions presented by foreign students may seem quite simple at first glance, but they turn out to be very fundamental and complex questions. Despite that challenge, Teramura still faced those questions with a most sincere attitude. This is why Teramura’s research on Japanese grammar goes beyond merely presenting a framework. It is a useful and productive endeavor that brings out the beautiful laws lurking behind the phenomena of Japanese grammar that are too obvious for native speakers to even notice.

Regarding the latter influence, which is related to the lack of detailed grammar references, Teramura built grammar on his own while teaching Japanese to international students. Here, we proceed to introduce a little background of the grammar research prior to Teramura.

According to Kinsui (1997), traditional Japanese grammar studies, recalled under

⁶ The original Japanese text is as follows: “本書の目的とするものも全くこれと同じで、その意味で本書の目標は実用文法の作成である。” (Teramura 1982:15)

⁷ The original Japanese text is as follows: “私の場合、これまでの文法研究をふりかえってみると、考えようとした問題は、外国人学生の質問がきっかけになったことが多い。” (Teramura 1988:112)

the name of *Kokubunpo* ‘national grammar’ or *Gakkobunpo* ‘school grammar,’ have the following characteristics: the main subjects of study are classical and ancient languages, and even modern languages focus on normative sentences instead of colloquial expressions. In order to be on par with the Western powers as a modern nation in the post-Meiji nationalist policies, literature as a proud national treasure and completed normative grammar based on it had to be in place. Accordingly, the study of Japanese language turned to classical study. Certainly, until World War II, practical sentences had to be written as literary sentences except for novels and very private letters, so there was also practical value in learning literary grammar. However, the modern language grammar of *Gakkobunpo* is actually a product of bad compromises imagined to introduce classical grammar, and is of little use other than for parts-of-speech classifications in dictionaries. Such grammar was taught uncritically at schools, resulting in the mass production of students who disliked grammar. Some of these students later became teachers, and more and more students became grammar-averse because of grammar-averse teachers.

Under these circumstances, while the productivity of the study of *Kokubunpo* ‘national grammar’ had declined remarkably, some new Japanese research flows had taken place after the war. One of them is Teramura’s grammar theory and the descriptive grammar of modern Japanese examined by researchers who are directly and indirectly influenced by it. As mentioned above, Teramura had excellent qualities as an educator, and thanks to that, many excellent researchers had been nurtured. Such researchers (Nishimitsu Yoshihiro, Noda Hisashi, Nita Yoshio, Mihara Kenichi, Masuoka Takashi, etc.), including Teramura himself, above all, valued direct help in teaching Japanese language, and for that reason, disregarded *Kokubunpo* ‘national grammar,’ especially *Gakkobunpo* ‘school grammar.’

According to Noda (2011), when Teramura became involved in Japanese language education, there was already a considerable number of Japanese textbooks for non-native speakers, but there was still no detailed grammar reference⁸. At that time, grammar was emphasized not only in Japanese language education but also in foreign language education. Teramura would have thought that grammar was of the utmost importance for proper Japanese language education.

Part 3: Insights Gained from Teramura’s Research Life

So far, we have looked at the purpose of Teramura’s grammar study and two main factors that motivated him to create a practical grammar. From now on, let us consider what we can learn from him as a researcher of Japanese grammar.

As Amano (2018) points out, “Results of studies on Japanese grammar are not

⁸ Anthony Alfonso’s *Japanese Language Patterns: A Structural Approach* and Samuel E. Martin’s *A Reference Grammar of Japanese* were published a little later.

only useful for the enhancement of linguistic research but can also be shared in different aspects of the contemporary society outside of the research field while possibly contributing to the development of new values.” Here, the application to Japanese language education is considered to be included in those aspects of the society as well.

Unfortunately, from the beginning of this century, there has been concern that the descriptive study of Japanese grammar is heading in the self-purposed direction, which means there are fewer and fewer “discoveries” required in the field of Japanese language education, and discoveries of phenomena that only fill in “the gaps in the system” have been valued. There is no doubt that the ultimate goal of Japanese linguistics (the descriptive study of Japanese grammar) is to elucidate the grammatical knowledge and competence of native speakers, and such an idea is effective in the developmental stage of the discipline. However, it is worth noting that Japanese linguistics, by all means, should not become a self-purposed discipline, which means research in that field should never be conducted only for itself.

In order to solve the problem that the descriptive study of Japanese grammar and Japanese language education have gradually separated, as a researcher of Japanese grammar, and in accordance with Teramura’s views, I believe that being useful for Japanese language education should always be one of the primary purposes of the descriptive study of Japanese grammar. Nevertheless, it is far from sufficient to simply apply the research results of Japanese language studies to Japanese language education because the purpose and emphasis of Japanese language education and Japanese language research are very different. The purpose of Japanese language education is to improve the communication skills of non-native speakers in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The purpose of Japanese language research, however, has traditionally been to provide knowledge of the structure of Japanese primarily to native speakers.

According to Noda (2005), trying to apply the results of Japanese language research directly to Japanese language education can have negative effects as well. The negative effects of systematicism and formalism can be cited. The negative effect of systematicism is that too much emphasis is placed on the grammatical system, and the negative effect of formalism is that there is too much of a tendency to start with form rather than function. In terms of these two aspects, Teramura’s research is rather a study of Japanese linguistics, and it must be said that it was not made entirely for Japanese language education.

Research on Japanese language education should not be limited to the results of Japanese language studies, but serve the purpose of looking for the best way to improve non-native speakers’ communication skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. For example, what expressions do we use when ordering food at a restaurant? What kind of education is needed to be able to properly understand the questions from the waiter/waitress? Such research on communication does not start from the structure/form of language, but from the context/situation in which the

language is actually used. We should find and organize the vocabulary, sentence patterns, and linguistic strategies needed for each situation and study how to teach them to non-native speakers properly.

The second thing we can learn from Teramura's life experience is that to produce good Japanese grammar research results, we should focus not only on our own specialty, which is Japanese linguistics, but also on related fields, such as linguistics and English language studies. Anyone familiar with Teramura's Japanese grammar research should be able to notice that in his research, there is coexistence between the idea of applying Western language theory to Japanese and the idea of contributing to language research by studying Japanese. As mentioned above, Teramura's starting point for studying Japanese grammar was based on linguistics research. Teramura's linguistics research initially tended to include generative grammar, but as his linguistics research deepened, he changed his direction to contribute to linguistics by studying Japanese. The restriction of the use of personal pronouns when expressing feelings and sensations, as mentioned above, is an example of a study by which he applied Western language theory to Japanese linguistics.

However, Teramura was never a scholar who applied theories and methods developed abroad to Japanese without criticism. As an unprecedented scholar, he succeeded in bringing out rules in Japanese in a highly universal manner that had not been noticed by staring at a number of living examples of Japanese with a sharp sense of language and the knowledge of the latest research results abroad. We can also find that many outstanding researchers like Teramura do not adhere to any one established theoretical framework, but critically examine various theories and extract only the parts that are most convincing to them.

Conclusion

Finally, let me summarize the main points that have been made in this paper. First, I briefly introduced Teramura's life and research achievements during his lifetime. From Teramura's Japanese studies, one general point becomes very clear: to become a qualified researcher of Japanese linguistics, one should not only focus on their own specialty, but also be aware of related fields, such as Japanese language education and contrasting research with other languages. Then, I moved on to discuss the research motivations and the academic environment that influenced and characterized his studies. Several observations in that part have shown that grammar that is useful for Japanese language education does not often come from Japanese grammar research itself, but from the process of teaching Japanese language to non-native speakers and the lessons and insights gained from it. Finally, I pointed out what we can learn from his life experience as a researcher of Japanese grammar: grammar study will produce good results only if we strive constantly toward the goal of being useful for Japanese language education and look to broader fields of research.

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