

Properties of Complex Compounds in Old Japanese

This project investigates complex compounds in Old Japanese (OJ), the language of 8th century Japan. Properties of compounds are well studied for modern Japanese, but less so for earlier stages of the language, and this project will add to our understanding of how the Japanese language developed over time.

Mithun (1984) describes noun incorporation as a syntactic morphological process. In her framework there are 4 types of noun incorporation. This framework is hierarchical:

- 1) lexical compounding where the noun is assigned the role of patient, location, or instrument by the incorporating verb (IV)
- 2) the manipulation of case, where the incorporated noun (IN) loses its argument status and another noun receives it
- 3) the manipulation of discourse structure, where the IN is part of information structure representing known (and not new) information
- 4) classificatory noun incorporation, where the IN narrows the scope of the IV but can be accompanied by an NP which classifies the IN

OJ shows evidence of types 1 and 4.

In addition, Rosen (1989) claims there are 2 separate word formation processes.

- 1) argument structure of the IV changes, so that the verb loses an argument
- 2) argument structure is unaltered

Rosen claims that a language may have one or the other process, but not both. OJ, however, shows both processes.

The data for the initial study were extracted from the Oxford Corpus of Old Japanese (OCOJ), a linguistically annotated corpus of the language of 8th century Japan, the earliest attested stage of the Japanese language. The data were then further annotated with information about orthography, verbal inflection, syntactic structure, whether the noun adjacent to a verb was bound or free, whether *rendaku* (sequential voicing) occurred, and whether the incorporated noun was modified.

Criteria for determining whether or not nouns are incorporated in OJ are 1) positive evidence for incorporation; 2) positive evidence against incorporation; and 3) absence of evidence against incorporation.

Unlike Modern Japanese, the data show that OJ has both noun and phrasal incorporation; incorporated nouns in OJ can be modified by adjectives, possessives, and relative clauses. A variety of semantic roles can be assigned to the incorporated noun, including both arguments and adjuncts. Subjects of intransitive verbs can be incorporated, and, finally, incorporated structures are not always nominalized and do not always occur in light verb constructions.

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