

A COMPARISON OF JAPANESE AND ENGLISH
OBJECT STRUCTURES

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1.1. This article proposes to deal with the difference between what are generally called the direct and indirect object expressions in English and Japanese. Since languages operate differently, we are not using these terms in a technical sense but as a means to identify the problem. The differences will come out in the discussion which follows.

2.1. Dr. Fries has said, "Like the 'subject', the 'object' is a technical name for a structure in which a Class 1 word enters, and this structure signals a variety of meanings." (1952, p. 184) Thus, for English, 'object' is described not in terms of the meaning it has, but rather in terms of the position or "spot" within the sentence. In the formula

D 1^a 2-d D 1^b

where the Class 2 word is not of the 2b list (cf. Fries, 1952, p. 189), 1^b is in the structure of "direct object." As Dr. Fries says, "Here ... the order is the most distinguishing feature." (1952, p. 191) And he has said in another place, "A single noun following the verb and not referring to the same person or thing as the subject is... the direct object." (Thorndike, p. 17) For the formula above, he gives the following illustrations:

The *dean* approved the *recommendations*
The *boy* lighted the *lamp*
The *guide* dug the *holes*

The "indirect object" is also a spot in the sentence which is determined by the order of the Class 1 word coming after the Class 2 word.

"When two nouns follow the verb, do not refer to the same person or thing as the subject noun, and do not each refer to the same person or thing as the other, the first noun is an indirect object. The second noun is a direct object." (Thorndike, p. 17)

Thus, "in formula (4), D 1^a 2 D 1^b D 1^c, the 1^b is 'indirect object' and the 1^c is 'direct object.' E.g.,

The school furnishes the *student* the *microscope*
The foreman gives the *workman* his *machine*.
The committee gets the *boy* his *job*"
(Fries, 1952, p. 193)

Thus the English object structure is signalled by word order.

2.2. One of the clearest statements of grammatical structure in Japanese is given by George Sansom when he says:

"It (the substantive) is brought into relation with other words by means of particles, through a process which may be regarded as agglutinative ... Thus, taking the substantive *otoko*¹, 'a man', it is brought into relation with other nouns and verbs, by means of particles, as in

<i>otoko no te</i>	'a man's hand'
<i>otoko wo² miru</i>	'to see a man'
<i>otoko ni yaru</i>	'to give to a man'". (p. 69)

Bernard Bloch gives a similar treatment. He gives us a list of what he calls "referent particles". In this list we see:

"O 'emphatic object'. After a noun: *Heitai o, mita* 'I saw a soldier' (when the emphasis is on what it was I saw);

Gyuumiku o tabeta 'I ate (some) beef'; ...

Ni 'in, on, at (of place or time); to; into', and a variety of other meanings ... *Kodomo ni yatta* 'I gave it to the child' ..." (p. 220)

In both of these quotations we see that the direct object "meaning" is expressed in Japanese by the particle *o*; and the indirect object "meaning" is expressed by the particle *ni*. Bloch calls this construction (noun-head plus particle) a relational phrase. These relational phrases, along with other phrases

¹Japanese has the following phonemes:

Consonants: /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /s/, /z/, /h/, /m/, /n/, /r/, and /ñ/.

/t/ before /i/ and /y/ becomes [č]

/t/ before /u/ becomes ts

/s/ before /i/ and /y/ becomes [š]

/z/ before /i/ and /y/ becomes [ž]

/h/ before /i/ and /y/ becomes [x]

/h/ before /u/ becomes [f]

Semi-vowels: /w/, /y/

Vowels /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/

²This is an old form of the particle *o* which is still heard as /wo/ after /ñ/. Sansom's is an historical grammar and therefore reflects this older pronunciation.

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made up of verbs or adjectives or adverbs, make up the sentence in Japanese. Although there is a preferred word order in the language, these phrases or parts-of-sentence, can come in any order. Kookitiroo Yuuzawa gives this example:³

Fujiwara ga asita Kyootoo ni iku rasii
Mr. Fujiwara tomorrow Kyoto to goes (it) seems

Although this sentence is made up of four phrases, the second phrase is composed of only one word while the other phrases are all composed of two words. In this case it is possible to change the position of these phrases.

<i>Fujiwara ga</i>	<i>Kyootoo ni</i>	<i>ikurasii</i>	<i>asita</i>
<i>asita</i>	<i>Fujiwara ga</i>	<i>Kyootoo ni</i>	<i>ikurasii</i>
<i>asita</i>	<i>Kyootoo ni</i>	<i>ikurasii</i>	<i>Fujiwara ga</i>
<i>Fujiwara ga</i>	<i>asita</i>	<i>ikurasii</i>	<i>Kyootoo ni</i>

However, it is just the opposite with the words out of which the phrases are made.

ga Fujiwara ni Kyooto rasiiku

is an impossible utterance. (Yuuzawa, p. 17-18)

These examples do not include a direct or indirect object expression, but they do illustrate that word order is not a structural signal in Japanese. The same is true in utterances containing object expressions. For example, the following all mean "I saw you":

Watakusi wa anata o mimasita
I you saw
Anata o watakusi wa mimasita
Anata o mimasita, watakusi wa

PROBLEM NO. I. In English the part-of-sentence which we designate as object, direct or indirect, has a fixed position in the order of words. In Japanese the direct and indirect objects are signalled by "particles" which, with the objects, form groups of words which have no fixed position within the sentence. Thus one of the problems which Japanese will have in learning the English "object" construction is word order.

PROBLEM NO. II. In English, since the object is expressed by position, a function word is not used. In Japanese a function word or particle is used. Therefore we will expect a Japanese learning English to insert a function word when none is called for, e.g., I asked to him a question

³The translation is mine. I have tried to stay as close as possible to a literal translation.

I gave to him the money
 You taught to me English

Here again, word order plays a part, since English can express the indirect object "meaning" with the words "to" or "for", but in these cases this part-of-sentence comes after the direct object expression.

2.4. Distribution. The distribution of the indirect object expression with *ni* is quite limited in Japanese. This is most likely due to the fact that this area of meaning is expressed by a different means. If the action of the main verb is directed toward the person speaking, the verbs *itadaku*, *kudasaru*, or *kureru* are added to the sentence. Thus we have:

<i>uta o utatte itadaku</i>	'sing me a song' or
'song sing receive'	'sing a song to me'

If the action is aimed at the person or people addressed, the verbs *ageru* or *yaru* (both meaning 'to give') are added, e.g.,

<i>uta o utatte ageru</i>	'sing you a song'
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These constructions make the distribution of the Japanese indirect object structure cover less area than that of the indirect object construction in English. Although this should not cause the Japanese to make mistakes in English, it does indicate that they will have to concentrate harder on the word order patterns as mentioned under Problem 1.

2.4.1. In collecting examples of the direct object expressions in Japanese, however, it soon becomes apparent that their structure covers a larger area than does the direct object structure in English. The following sentences are illustrative:

1. *onna no boosi o warau* 'to laugh at (about) a woman's hat'
2. *saki o arasou* 'to strive for first place'
3. *hito o matu* 'wait for a man'
4. *sigoto o tasukeru* 'help with work'
5. *miti o aruku* 'to walk in the street'
6. *sora o. tobu* 'to fly in the sky'
7. *saka o kudaru* 'go down a hill'
8. *ike o mawaru* 'to walk around a lake'
9. *yuubinkyoku o tooru* 'to pass by the post office'
10. *gakkoo o sotugyoo suru* 'to graduate from school'

From the above examples, it is evident that where the Japanese language consistently uses the direct object expression with

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o, English uses a Class 2 word with various function words.

PROBLEM NO. III. In each of these cases in which Japanese covers more area than English does, we can expect such non-English utterances as:

I am waiting my friend (from example 3)

The bird is flying the sky (from example 6)

I graduated Tokyo University (from example 10)

2.5. Occurrence. "As one attempts to survey and describe the structural patterns of English sentences, he cannot escape the necessity of separating sharply the utterances that are used to stimulate various types of responses from those utterances that are themselves the oral responses regularly elicited by certain structural arrangements." (Fries, 1952, p. 172) This is equally true of the Japanese language. The situation utterances in both languages are generally the so-called "complete sentences." These we have in general discussed above. In the response utterance, however, we see a contrast in what parts-of-sentence occur or do not occur, especially in regard to the direct object.

Pattern: Who did you give the book to? *Dare ni hon o ageta ka?*

'who to book gave'

I gave it to Mr. A.

A-san ni ageta.

Mr. A to gave

The direct object is present.

The direct object is

not expressed.

PROBLEM NO. IV. Since in Japanese it is not necessary to express the direct object, we would expect in answer to the question: "Who did you give the book to?" the answer:

I gave to Mr. A.

Although this is understandable English, it is not standard. Furthermore, this type of reply could lead to gross misunderstanding, as is evidenced in the different meanings expressed by the following pair of sentences:

I returned to the teacher.

I returned it to the teacher.

3.1. It is difficult to compare two languages as structurally different as Japanese and English. The above has been an attempt to show the problems that will arise because of the structural differences in the object expressions. With this knowledge,

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the person teaching English to native speakers of Japanese should be able to anticipate the problems that will arise in this area and meet them more intelligently.

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